

VOLUME 1

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF TRADED SERVICE DELIVERY, USING
SOFT SYSTEMS METHODOLOGY**

by

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Abstract

At a time where national budget cuts and changes in Government policy have reduced Local Authority budgets and workforce numbers, many Educational Psychology (EP) services across England and Wales are undergoing a period of rapid change and transition. In order to maintain EP services, many have begun to develop a traded model of service delivery (AEP, 2011). Within this context, this study utilised Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) (Checkland, 1981; 1990) as the methodological framework, to gain the perceptions of a group of Educational Psychologists (EPs) who work within a 'traded' EP service in order to understand the implications of this new model of service delivery on the activities and the role of the EP.

This study utilised SSM to gain EPs' views through focus group discussions, with a group of senior EPs (n= 4) and main grade EPs (n=5). Thematic analysis highlighted 'job insecurity', 'not knowing budgets' and 'increased workloads' as the problem-situations arising from working in the traded service delivery model. These themes were underpinned by systems relating to 'judging EP performance', 'schools as power-holders' and 'marketing' the EP service. The SSM process enabled EPs to view actions in order to improve practice which were focused on developing capacity within the EP service and working to clarify the expectations of EPs. The findings of this study are explored in relation to the literature reviewed and implications for EP professional practice are also discussed.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to:

My Parents, Muhammad and Safia Khan,
For your love and support.

My son Zak and daughter Aima,
For inspiring me to achieve my best!

And my husband Tahir,
For your unfailing patience, support and belief in me.

Read and thy Lord is most generous,

Who taught by the pen,

Taught man what he knew not.

(Surat 96: 3-5)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Thesis

This thesis forms part of the assessed requirements for the three year doctoral degree of Applied Educational and Child Psychology (2010 - 2013) with the University of Birmingham. Within this programme, the thesis is presented in two volumes: Volume one presents an original empirical study conducted by the Trainee Educational Psychologist, and Volume two comprises four professional practice reports which focus on various key areas of Educational Psychology practice in order to demonstrate the breadth of the EP role.

1.2 Aims and Rationale of the Study

The present study aims to explore Educational Psychologists' perceptions about the model of service delivery used within the Educational Psychology (EP) service in which I was placed during the second and third years of the doctoral training. The rationale for choosing this area was due to its pertinence to this particular EP service, as it had undergone the transition from being a centrally-funded Local Authority (LA) service, in April 2011, to a service that schools could purchase, referred to as a 'traded' model of service delivery.

In discussions with the Principal EP, it was mentioned that it would be valuable for the service to gain the EPs' perceptions about the new traded service delivery model in order to support the development and refinement of the model to better suit the needs of the EP service. To elicit and address the perceptions of EPs within this service, I decided to use a structured approach to ensure issues arising could be discussed in a structured and focused manner. This study applied Soft Systems Methodology (SSM), which Checkland and Poulter (2006) define as an approach that is:

'An organised way of tackling perceived problematic (social) situations. It is action-orientated. It organises thinking about such situations so that action to bring about improvement can be taken.'

(Checkland & Poulter, 2006, p. xv)

As an organisational development framework, SSM offers a structured approach, utilising specific techniques, which was ascertained to fit well with the type of research I wanted to conduct. As the development of traded service delivery was relatively new to this EP service, it was felt that this methodology would support this EP service's need to gain an understanding of the implications of working within this service delivery model.

In order to explore EPs' perceptions on traded service delivery, SSM was used to frame and address the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What do EPs perceive as problem situations arising from the traded service delivery model?

Research Question 2: What relevant systems are perceived to be operating within the problem situation?

Research Question 3: What activities could help address the problem situation to improve practice?

The research questions were developed from SSM, in order to ensure that the methodology was able to address the key focus of this study. Based on the discussions with the Principal EP, it was noted that some aspects of traded service delivery were working well; however there was a perception that there was underlying dissatisfaction with the service delivery model which had not been openly discussed and addressed within the team. Therefore, in keeping with the SSM terminology and approach, this study intentionally focused on the 'problem situations' within traded service delivery, in order to elicit and clarify these, before developing actions for moving forward. I felt that without fully uncovering and understanding the situations in the service delivery model, in which problems were perceived to occur, discussing possible solutions would be ineffective for the EPs and the service as a whole.

1.3 Search Strategy

In order to review the literature related to EP service delivery and the traded service delivery model, a key word search was conducted using Boolean logic on the bibliographic databases: PsychInfo, Eric ProQuest and Ovid SP. Key terms within the search included: educational, psychology, service, delivery, models, commissioning, traded and practice.

Additional searches were also conducted on Google, Google Scholar, COPAC and government websites, utilising the key words listed above and applying a snowball technique of referring to citations and references from published articles in order to expand the search and to ensure a breadth of literature pertaining to this domain was examined.

1.4 Outline of this Volume

This volume is structured into the following sections:

- Chapter 1 – Introduction to the Volume.
- Chapter 2 – Literature Review: A critical review of the literature relating to Educational Psychology service delivery, including models of service delivery and details of the shift to trading as a model of service delivery. The chapter

concludes with an examination of systems approaches that can be used to support the development of traded EP service delivery.

- Chapter 3 – Methodology: An introduction to Soft Systems Methodology, stating the research design and methods utilised. The philosophical stance of this study is also examined.
- Chapter 4 – Results: Findings are presented, based on the thematic analysis conducted on the focus group transcripts, highlighting key themes and sub themes. This chapter also presents the outcomes from the application of specific SSM techniques.
- Chapter 5 – Discussion: The findings from each stage of the SSM approach are discussed in relation to each research question and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.
- Chapter 6 – Conclusion: The study is concluded with an overview of the key findings and implications for EP Professional practice.

Chapter 2

Critical Literature Review

Chapter 2

Critical Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the Chapter

Since the formation of the Coalition Government in May 2010, socio-political factors such as local and national budget cuts to public services and changes in educational policy have had considerable implications for Local Authority (LA) Educational Psychology (EP) services across the UK (AEP, 2011; Morewood & Rumble, 2013). The Coalition Government's comprehensive spending review, in October 2010, which focused on '*Britain's unavoidable deficit reduction plan*' (HM Treasury, 2010, p.5), was viewed as an urgent priority in order to secure fairness, growth and economic stability for the longer term. This has meant that LAs have faced the harshest cut-backs in funding that they have experienced in years, in order to support the national agenda to reduce spending, and to increase productivity.

Within this climate of uncertainty, rapid change and increasing market forces, many EP services, previously funded by LAs, have begun to develop 'traded' models of service delivery (AEP, 2011) in order to maintain jobs and secure services. As an innovative approach to service delivery, trading is a domain within the EP profession which is beginning to receive increasing attention within the

literature (Fallon, et al., 2010; Allen & Hardy , 2013), although, at present, research in this domain is limited.

Due to the dearth of literature surrounding traded EP service delivery, this chapter takes a broader stance of critically reviewing the literature relating to EP service delivery, to examine how it is defined and the models of EP service delivery mentioned within the literature. The impact of trading is discussed in relation to EP services and systems approaches are examined as organisational frameworks that could support the development of EP service delivery in order to address the heightened emphasis on efficiency and ‘value for money’ that accompany the notions of trading and commissioning EP services. Each section in this chapter aims to address one of the following overarching questions:

- How is service delivery defined within the context of EP practice? (*Section 2*);
- What are the most prevalent models of EP service delivery identified from the literature and the limitations arising from these models? (*Section 3*);
- What is the current context of EP service delivery? (*Section 4*);
- How can systems approaches support the development of EP service delivery? (*Section 5*).

2.2 Educational Psychology Service Delivery

2.2.1 Defining EP Service Delivery

Within the extant literature pertaining to Educational Psychology, ‘service delivery’ refers to the models and frameworks used within EP practice (Leadbetter, 2000; Kelly, et al., 2008). A review of the literature relating to EP service delivery, from 1978 onwards, indicates that there is no definition provided for the term ‘service delivery’ within literature relating to the EP profession. The lack of an explicit definition for EP service delivery could infer that an implicit understanding of ‘service delivery’ is sufficient for EP practice. This view, however, is contrary to the plethora of research and literature on service delivery models and frameworks which aim to provide coherence and transparency in EP practice (Leadbetter, 2000; Wagner, 2000; Kelly, et al., 2008). These models of service delivery also underlie the continuing debates and discussions around the need to clarify the EP role and to highlight its distinctive contribution (Gillham, 1978; Wolfendale, et al., 1992; DfEE, 2000; Farrell, et al., 2006).

2.2.2 Large-Scale Reviews of EP Service Delivery

Service delivery in the EP profession has been reviewed at various points over time, often closely relating to changes in the national educational policy context. The Summerfield report (DES, 1968) was the first large scale review conducted of

the profession and practice of EPs in the UK. This review arose from the considerable expansion of the EP profession following the formation of EP services and child guidance clinics in the UK, in the 1950s (Gillham, 1978; Sampson, 1980; Wolfendale, et al., 1992).

The Summerfield Report (DES, 1968) emphasised the importance of EPs using an interactionist perspective to view children in relation to their environment (DES, 1968, p.9) and also suggested that EPs' work should centre on providing services at an early intervention or preventative stage (DES, 1968, p.58). This report provided substantial recommendations for EPs in order to shift the emphasis of work from the individually-focused, traditional EP role, to a preventative and holistic approach to EP practice.

During the early days of the EP profession in the UK, individual differences and a medical model approach to working with children were mostly adhered to. Gillham (1978) mentions that the medical model continued to prevail in some services until the late 1970s, demonstrating the significant long-term impact of this approach upon the EP profession and how EP services were delivered, hence this practice is referred to as the 'traditional' EP role. Farrell (2010) suggests that EPs' resistance to changing the perception of themselves as testers, and focusing solely on the child, may have developed from the belief that testing was a skill and expertise specific to EPs that no other professional group had previously laid claim

to. Therefore, eliminating this function would mean the possibility of reducing the value of the EP profession.

A review of the educational provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) was undertaken, in 1978, to examine the most effective use of educational provisions and resources. The recommendations of this review, known as The Warnock Report (DES, 1978), were used as the basis for the 1981 Education Act, which aimed to ensure that children with SEN received the appropriate level of additional support in schools. This Act also introduced the requirement for Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to assess children and provide suitable educational provision for them, which could enable children with SEN to be integrated within their local mainstream schools rather than sending them to special schools. This recommendation was based on the Warnock Report's (DES, 1978) view that children should remain in their local schools, wherever possible.

The main impact of this legislation on the EP role was the introduction of 'statements' for specifying how children's needs should be met. The process for producing a statement for children with SEN was enshrined in the 1981 Education Act, creating a statutory role for EPs, where a Psychological Advice was completed as part of the process towards a Statement of SEN. Dessent (1992) described the shift in the EP role due to this legislation:

‘Since the 1981 Act... Educational psychologists have added to their role of ‘defining specialness’ a further role- that of ‘defining resource-worthiness.’

(Dessent, 1992, p. 36)

Dessent (1992) argued that this legislation emphasised the importance of the EP role in defining children who required additional or special provision, and asserted that this had become the main purpose for employing EPs within LEAs.

The impact of the legislation on EP service delivery was fully ascertained and presented in the DfEE (2000) Report, which conducted an extensive review of EP services in England, aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of EP service delivery. The report, entitled *‘Educational Psychology Services (England): Current Role, Good Practice and Future Directions’* (DfEE, 2000) was the first extensive review of the work and role of EPs since the Summerfield Report (DES, 1968). The review gathered data from a sample of mainstream and special schools, and groups of parents, teachers and practitioners from health and social care, in order to gauge views from those who used the EP services, as well as the EPs themselves. The key findings from the report are presented in Table 1 (below).

Table 1.

Areas Investigated	Summary of Key Findings	
	Strengths	Weaknesses
Current Range Of Educational Psychology Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPs knowledge and skills highly regarded by service users. • Where LEA and EPS work collaboratively on strategies, focus on CoP work is reduced. • Parents view EPs as an important link with schools and other agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some disparity between the EPS perceptions and the Users expectations of the EP role. • Lack of clarity about the prime function of the EP role. • EPs would prefer emphasis on preventative and problem-solving work.
Future Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement that EP role is vital for supporting children with SEN and in supporting schools. • Emphasis should be on preventative rather than reactive work. • Importance of consultation and problem-solving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Level Statements and monitoring procedures are important for ensuring quality of service. • Schools wanted consistency of service and more EP time.
Opportunities And Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variations in the availability of resources to local authorities • Different expectations of the service • LEA policies and structures • Models of service delivery adopted by individual services • Training and skills needed to support a wider role in the LEA • Enthusiasm for collaborative working with other support services 	

Summary of the key findings from the DfEE (2000) Report, pp.3-9.

Table 1 illustrates the strengths and weaknesses in EP service delivery as viewed by EPs and other service users. The DfEE (2000) report concluded that clarifying the EP role to service users, ensuring a consistent and transparent approach to service delivery, and increasingly focusing upon early intervention and preventative work were central to ensuring effective EP practice. Although the statutory role was viewed to impede the expansion of the EP role, writers such as Maliphant (1997) and Mackay (1997) highlighted the range of activities that service users were interested in, which supported the growing breadth of EP service delivery. However, the challenge continued to lie in putting these visions into practice.

Six years after the DfEE (2000) report, another comprehensive review of EPs' work was commissioned by Farrell, et al. (2006) entitled: '*A Review of the Functions and Contribution of Educational Psychologists*' which attempted to ascertain the profession's 'distinctive contribution' in light of the ECM agenda (DfES, 2003). This study also examined how EPs could work effectively within multi-agency teams, whilst retaining their professional identity.

This review gathered a wealth of data, based on questionnaires, telephone and face-to-face interviews and site visits to eight LAs, to examine service users' views about the EPs' distinct contribution and factors that facilitated or created barriers to working proactively rather than reactively (Farrell, et al., 2006, p.8). The report found that EPs were making a unique contribution to the Every Child Matters

(ECM) agenda (DfES, 2003), but all respondents agreed that EPs were too heavily involved in statutory duties; although this work was highly regarded. This review stressed the discrepancy between the actual work undertaken by EPs and the wealth of areas where EPs could make a positive contribution, such as strategic work, capacity-building and facilitating good working relationships in multi-agency teams (Farrell, et al., 2006).

Farrell et al., (2006) found that the distinctive contribution of EPs related to the skills and training background in psychology which were invaluable when working with other professionals, schools and children. However, working in multi-agency teams meant clarifying expectations and perceptions of the role to ensure that other services had a clear understanding of what EPs could deliver that would be distinct from other services. The report also stated that clear service level agreements with schools and other stakeholders would enable the role to be more clearly perceived, which was also asserted by other writers such as Leadbetter, (2000) and Baxter and Frederickson (2005).

Although EP service delivery is not specifically defined within the literature, it could be argued that this has partly been due to a lack of clarity about the EP role itself. Large scale reviews have been conducted over the past four decades in order to understand and raise others' awareness of EPs' work, which have highlighted good practice and presented ways in which EPs can make a distinctive contribution when working with schools, children and families. These reviews have highlighted the distinct contribution of the EP role; however there is continued

debate and discussion around this topic which inevitably has implications for defining the service that EPs deliver too.

2.3 Models of Service Delivery

Within the UK, research conducted into the models of service delivery adopted by EPs, highlight common approaches which are used to structure how EP services are delivered. The most commonly referred to models are: time allocation, service level agreements and consultation (DfEE, 2000; Leadbetter 2000; Farrell et al., 2006). These models of EP service delivery pertain to literature and research conducted prior to the recent changes in the political and economic climate due to the change of Government, since May 2010. However, to ensure that the models of service delivery discussed here are relevant to the current practice of EPs, internet searches were conducted in order to elucidate the most commonly alluded to models of EP service delivery within the UK since 2010 (Search terms: *educational psychology service delivery UK*).

These searches revealed that although, in the current economic climate, budgets and financial incomes are undergoing rapid change and reductions in a number of LAs, many EP services continue to utilise the models discussed within the literature, prior to the current political and economic changes, although these may now be incorporated into broader traded frameworks. 'Traded' EP services are further discussed in Section 2.4. The following sections view the most commonly referred to models of service delivery within the literature: time allocation, service

level agreements and consultation, followed by an examination of their limitations. It should be noted that the models of service delivery mentioned in the following sections are not mutually exclusive and exist in many different combinations with some models being more strongly linked together than others (Leadbetter, 2000).

2.3.1 Time Allocation

The time allocation model of EP service delivery involves the application of complex formulae and weightings in order to allocate EPs' time within the service (Leadbetter 2000; 2002). Historically, this model of service delivery emerged as a result of the increasing numbers of children referred to EP services for statutory assessment under the 1981 Education Act (Leadbetter, 2002). This Act introduced the requirement for LEAs to assess children and provide suitable educational provision for them and it also imposed the notion that children with SEN should be integrated within their local mainstream schools rather than sending them to special schools. In order to reduce the number of children on EP waiting lists and to manage referrals (Born & Sawyer, 1979) EP services developed a time allocation approach to delivering services (Wolfendale, et al., 1992).

Several studies, published during the 1990s, which examined time allocation models, focused on individual EP services that used different formulae for defining the equitable distribution of EP time in schools (Wolfendale, et al., 1992; Arney, 1995; Watmough & Thomson, 1995). More recently, various writers have

mentioned the significance of utilising a transparent approach to show how services deploy EPs' time to various activities within the service (Imich, 1999a; 1999b, Leadbetter, 2000; Wagner, 2000; Jensen et al., 2002; Rothi, et al., 2008; Fallon et al., 2010) in order to enhance effectiveness and value for money.

As the professional role has developed, EPs have been placed under increasing time pressures to fulfil the demands made by service users, including schools, parents and other services. Although the statutory role has been viewed as a significant aspect of the EP role, the breadth and range of functions that EPs can deliver covers a broad remit, such as providing training, research and intervention (DfEE, 2000; Scottish Executive, 2002; Farrell et al., 2006) which impact on the time available to EPs. Research findings from large scale reviews of EP practice and service delivery within England have consistently found that schools have often reported to be dissatisfied with the limited time availability of EP support (DES, 1968; DfEE, 2000: Farrell, 2006).

2.3.1.1 Limitations of Time Allocation

The time allocation model is argued to enable EP services to manage the ever-increasing demands of statutory work, bureaucracy, and report writing, which continue to impose significant demands on EPs' time up to the present day (Fallon et al., 2010). However, the allocation of EP time is also viewed as a barrier to effective EP service delivery:

'The most commonly cited barrier to effective practice, in particular from staff in school, was the limited contact time with EPs. Most respondent groups valued highly the contact that they had, but would have welcomed more.'

(Farrell, et al., 2006, p.9)

Mackay (2007) suggested that the demands on EP time for statutory work have implications for providing a range of other important services, such as delivering therapeutic work. The view that EPs have limited time and competing demands on their time is also echoed within international research (Suldo et al., 2010; Yeo and Choi, 2011). Research conducted by Atkinson et al., (2011a) into the time EPs are allocated for undertaking therapeutic work, identified the time allocation model as a significant limiting factor for being able to apply a range of therapeutic interventions. Similarly, Squires and Dunsmuir (2010) and Atkinson et al., (2011b) also reported that the barriers to EP work related to protecting EP time and the restricted time EPs had available to them.

A study conducted by Imich (1999b) into the structures that support time allocation identified specific disadvantages associated with time allocation models of service delivery, including:

- the system can restrict the flexibility to respond to the unexpected;*
- record-keeping systems are unable to be absolutely precise and therefore the data are never absolute;*

- *some EPs may have concerns about the perceived loss of control and professional autonomy.'*

(Imich, 1999b, p.96)

The restricted flexibility within time allocation models, and the related concerns of loss of power and autonomy, has led to frustration and dissatisfaction with the EP role which has been chronicled in the literature since the seminal work of Gillham (1978) concerning the reconstruction of the Educational Psychology profession.

Another area of dissatisfaction arising from the time allocation model relates to the emphasis of report-writing, particularly for the purpose of statutory assessments (Lyons, 1999; Leadbetter, 2000; DfEE, 2000; Farrell et al; 2006). Fallon et al., (2010) suggest that in the current economic climate, with the increase in EP services being commissioned, the emphasis on activities undertaken by EPs will relate more closely with 'customer expectations' and providing evidence of 'value for money' (Rowland, 2002; Baxter & Frederickson, 2005). Thus, it is argued, that the time allocated for activities, including statutory work, may be increasingly influenced by the work that EPs are commissioned to do, which may reduce the emphasis on report writing, but may increase the pressures and demands of the 'customer' in other areas of EP work.

2.3.2 Service Level Agreements

Service Level Agreements, SLAs, developed as a model of EP service delivery in the early 1990s following the call for reappraising working practices to meet the requirements of the Education Reform Act 1988 and the Children Act 1989, which demanded service restructures and a greater focus on how services were evaluated.

SLAs are statements of principles, rights and responsibilities which provide schools and other service users with standards for the service being provided, which ensure quality, performance and enhance the accountability of professional activity (Wolfendale, et al., 1992). SLAs developed from the position that in order to provide a high quality service, EP services needed to strive towards transparent practice by demonstrating and evaluating the effectiveness of the delivery of services (DfEE, 2000). Therefore, many EP SLAs incorporate mechanisms for maintaining regular appraisal and evaluation of services that are provided and present clear aims and objectives for the service.

Public services are expected to provide a high quality service to its service users which are transparent and accountable (Pearson, 1989). The same is true for EP services (Gersch et al, 1990: Dessent, 1994), where SLAs are used as the model for service delivery in order to address the needs of its service users and also provide a framework within which EP services are delivered, and clarifying service

users' expectations of what the EPs can offer. Leadbetter (2000) reported that SLAs are commonly found to make reference to time allocation models and state the time available for EPs in schools, which enables the explicit clarification of the distribution of time and duties within the EP service (Imich, 1999a). SLAs also state what EPs can offer to schools, by supporting an increased recognition of the range of services EPs' can provide.

2.3.2.1 Limitations of Service Level Agreements

The concept of SLAs is based on a market-driven economy, by creating a statement of the services' aims and creating a portfolio of services and products, which are aimed at encouraging service users to 'buy-into' the service (Wolfendale et al., 1992). This is highly relevant to the present political and economic context in the UK, since 2010, and was also a significant issue in the early 1990s where budget cuts and the political context appeared to indicate an impending shift towards commissioning and trading services, although the impact of these factors was not as extensive then, as at the present time.

Much research undertaken into the utilisation of SLAs within EP services has identified a sense of restriction on the autonomy of the EP, reducing creative practice and also the lack of flexibility to work in different ways in order to meet the needs of the service users, i.e. children, families and schools (Imich 1999a; 1999b; Leadbetter 2000; DfEE, 2000; Lown et al., 2001; Norwich 2005).

Conversely, the DfEE report (2000), reviewing the professional role and practice of EPs within England and Wales, found that a key concern for respondents was the lack of clarity around the EP role and:

‘... A mismatch between what educational psychology services think they should be doing and what users perceive as their role.’

(DfEE, 2000, p.4)

Furthermore, the DfEE report (2000) recommended the use of SLAs in order to provide a clear statement of what service users could expect from the EP service. This report highlighted the importance of ensuring a robust SLA was put in place within EP services and shared with users of the service to encourage transparent practice.

In 2010, the AEP set out a list of key principles for the delivery of EP services, which have been further adapted and refined following the development of traded EP services (AEP, 2010). These principles are recommended as the basis for EP SLAs, which are required to ensure a high quality service that incorporate evaluative strategies to monitor value for money, consistency of the service delivery and accountable practice. Therefore, SLAs and principles for service delivery support a transparent approach to EP working practices, but it could be argued that this also limits the creativity and breadth that is inextricably linked to the EP role.

2.3.3 Consultation

Consultation as a model of EP service delivery originates from a social psychological perspective (Kelly et al., 2008), where the emphasis is placed upon understanding that behaviour is intrinsically linked to the context in which it occurs, thus in order to fully comprehend an action, it needs to be viewed in relation to the social circumstances that impinge on an individual.

This framework is underpinned by social constructionist and systemic psychological theories which primarily assert that the view of the world is built or 'constructed', and these constructions inform how we view ourselves and others. These personal constructs, once elicited, can be utilised to shift thinking and develop alternative views of the world (Ravenette, 1997). Consultation utilises this concept to analyse thinking around a particular concern in order to understand what factors maintain this view of the world.

EPs apply consultative practice at different levels of a context, which is referred to as 'Systemic thinking', e.g. individual, class and organisational level, (Wagner, 2000, p.13). Systemic Thinking aims to develop thinking around the systems that may be causing difficulties for an individual. These systems are often inter-related and can be in conflict with each other, which causes problems to arise, that a consultation approach can help to address. Systemic thinking is also significant when working within a multi-disciplinary context, where the EP's role needs to be

defined and explained to other services (Kerslake & Roller, 2000). Consultation asserts that through working collaboratively with colleagues in other agencies, schools, parents and other service users, effective ways for overcoming a concern can be developed (Wagner, 2000, p.13). Consultation provides an overarching framework for EP service delivery, but within this it also provides a structure for ensuring reflective practice.

The consultation framework for EP service delivery (Table 2.) enables the exploration of a concern with service users, through a collaborative approach, which aims to gradually shift from the expert-consultee model of working to one where a shared understanding of the concern is developed collaboratively (Kelly et al., 2008). Review and evaluation is incorporated into the consultative approach through initially gaining service users' expectations regarding the outcomes they would hope to achieve and reiterating this at the end of the consultation in order to review the extent to which the service users' expectations were met. Farouk (1999) suggests that the model and process of consultation should be made explicit and a transparent record-keeping system can ensure that service users are fully aware of the process and are able to take ownership of, and reflect on any change that occurs.

Table 2.

Consultation Process (What)	Activity undertaken (How)	Purpose (Why)
Externalising The Problem / Concern	Process of enquiry, showing genuine curiosity about the concern.	Once the concern is externalised, the person tends to see it differently and, therefore, will tend to act differently towards it.
Getting 'Meta': Taking A Helicopter View	Questioning the concern: What has been tried, Effects of strategies, what changes are sought, the views of the child and others, and other relevant factors.	Encouraging a more comprehensive view of the concern and the roles in relation to these concerns so that the person concerned may start to access their own problem-solving skills.
The Paradigm Shift	Examination of more complex patterns between focus and features of situation, to enable a shift in the perception of the concern from within-the-person to the interaction of the person and the situation.	This leads to the emergence of ways to change, both directly, with the person, and indirectly, with the situation.
Engaging In Self-Reflexivity	The person is engaged in a process which helps them to recognise their own role in the patterns of behaviour.	Possibilities for change develop through taking different actions. It helps each professional view themselves contextually.

A Summary of the Consultation Framework (Wagner, 2000, p.15)

2.3.3.1 Limitations of Consultation

The term 'consultation' can have implications for viewing the EP as the expert who holds the knowledge which can be imparted, akin to diagnosing an illness and then prescribing a treatment (Kelly et al., 2008). This harks back to the 'traditional' EP role where an individually-focused approach to service delivery was employed, when EPs worked within child guidance clinics and used the 'deficit model' to assess children (Farrell, 2010, p.586) which contemporary practitioners have endeavoured to move away from.

Wagner (2000) argued that in order for EP services to move away from the traditional view of EP work, pertaining to the assessment of children and acting as 'gatekeepers' for educational provision, EPs needed to actively reflect on their role and service delivery models in order to move towards a collaborative way of working, which is the view supported by a consultative approach.

On the other hand, Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) assert that EP service delivery should incorporate individual casework as an important element, rather than focusing solely on systemic practices:

'There is a need for individual casework in the education sphere, whether those within the EP profession like it or not, and, if a profession that is already uniquely placed within the field fails to deliver, then the customer will go to another supplier.'

(Boyle and Lauchlan, 2009, p.81)

The main limitation of consultation as an approach to service delivery relates to the view that EPs can become removed from the child due to consulting with the adults supporting the child (Turner et al., 2010). Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) argue that EPs are in a unique position as they are able to work collaboratively with individuals in the systems around the child, whilst also being able to work directly with the child and seek out their views.

Some writers argue that consultation can be effectively used as one method of information gathering within a broader framework for problem-solving (Monsen et al., 1998; Kelly, 2006; Kelly et al., 2008) rather than as a stand-alone approach which may only gain the perspectives of the adults working with the child. Within the literature, consultation is the most frequently cited model of EP service delivery; however the way in which the term 'consultation' is construed and applied varies greatly across EP services within the UK.

2.4 Traded EP Services

2.4.1 Political Context

In June 2010, following the formation of the Coalition Government, a national agenda to reduce the UK's economic deficit was set in place. Shifting public services to 'traded' services was viewed as a direct consequence of the Coalition Government's comprehensive spending review (HM Treasury, 2010) which has led to significant

cut-backs in local and national funding, in order to support the national agenda to reduce spending.

The SEN Green paper (DfE, 2011) *'Support and Aspiration'* was published to address the political agenda to reduce spending, by transferring power to professionals who worked on the 'front line: *'to encourage professionals to establish clearer systems of collaborative working'* (DfE, 2011, p.5).

This transition of power from public to more private services has had implications for the delivery of services, as Sánchez-Vidal (2005) asserts:

'...the interests of the majority are best represented by public institutions, while deregulation, flexibility and pure competition generally work to the benefit of the few powerful, at the expense of the (silent) majorities.'

(Sanchez-Vidal, 2005, p. 67)

The new economic priorities created by the Coalition Government have diminished the influence of the 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) legislation and the model of multi-agency working espoused by the previous Government, replacing these with the concept of 'trading' services to service users as an alternative model of service delivery for public services.

Under the current climate of austerity and reduction in central government budgets, EP services have had to take radical steps to move the profession in a direction that would ensure sustainability. Inextricably linked to these changes has been the notion

of the unique and distinct features of the profession which could increase the profession's marketability and encourage schools and other service users to buy into the services that EPs have to offer (Fallon, et al., 2010).

2.4.2 Formation of Traded EP Services

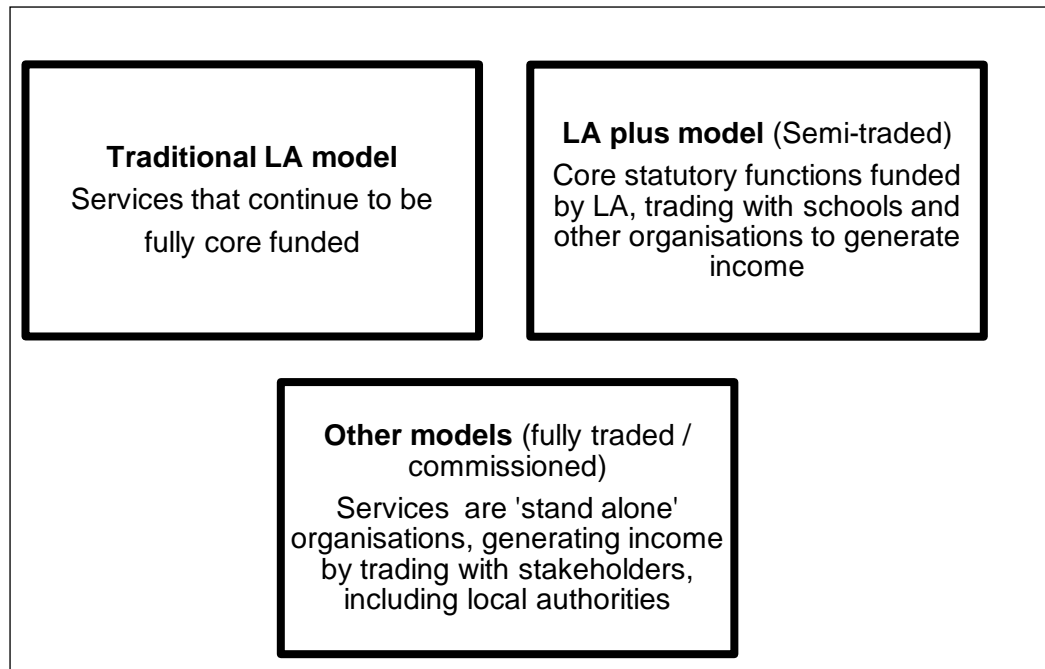
The EP profession has had to undertake a rapid transition to ensure its survival and future prospects. The Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) published a circular in response to the changing political climate, stating:

'local authorities are being encouraged to develop alternative models for delivering educational psychology services which have the aim of "increasing parental confidence" by having the service operate at "arm's length" from local authorities.'

(AEP, 2010, p. 1)

This circular included details on the formation of 'traded' services, which were described as being based on a business approach to service delivery. A subsequent paper published jointly by the AEP and British Psychological Society (BPS), in November 2011, discussed some of the different models that could be applied within EP services. Figure 1 below, broadly illustrates the nature of service delivery models that were described by the AEP in 2011.

Figure 1.



The nature of current EP services (AEP, 2011, p.3)

Figure 1 presents traded EP service delivery as three discrete models; however, in reality, EP service delivery ranges across these models, with a diverse variety of models which are referred to as 'traded' service delivery. Thus, in this thesis, where reference is made to the 'traded' service delivery model, this is only in relation to one instance of this type of service delivery model, and is not meant to imply that this is the same type of traded model adhered to by other EP services.

To ensure that all EP services adhered to the same professional and ethical standards, regardless of the nature of the service in which they worked, the AEP

(2011) set out 14 key principles that EP service delivery models would be measured against and be required to fulfil (AEP, 2011 p.5).

The shift to traded EP services has also heightened the need for increasingly accountable practice to ensure consistency in quality, effectiveness and transparent outcomes. To support the success of traded EP services, earlier writers have indicated that service users must have a clear understanding about what EP services can offer. This view that was underlined by Tizard over 3 decades ago:

‘...there is a clear need to sort ourselves out, to make it clear what we can and cannot do, to concentrate our resources on what is likely to be effective.’

(Tizard, 1976, cited in Thomas, 1987, p.13)

In regards to trading with service users, Ernst and Hiebert (2002) argue that marketing services enables the preservation of the service along with providing opportunities for broadening the range of services that can be provided (p.79). On the other hand, Fallon et al. (2010) argue that moving towards marketing and trading EP services will pose challenges for EPs’ professional identity and may lead to an increase in EPs developing specialisms or a skill set portfolio which enables individual EPs and EP services to offer a greater range of services, similar to a catalogue of available services, that service users may find of benefit to their needs.

2.4.3 Accountability and Ethical Practice

The development of traded EP services has introduced changes to the profession which had not been encountered in the past. The vision of educational psychology has undergone another transformation which now centres on delivering services in an ethical, accountable way, whilst encouraging service users to continue to 'buy into' the service EPs provide.

Fallon et al., (2010) assert that EP services may be placed in direct competition if EPs decide to choose where they wish to work in relation to their own professional interests. Thus, greater publicisation of what EP services can offer may be the direction that traded EP services will need to move towards, to ensure the services provided are clearly set out for EPs as well as service users.

Although traded EP services are in the early stages of development as a coherent model for practice, there are some areas that may create ethical challenges for EP practice. The Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) published a circular setting out details of ethical principles which EP services should follow, particularly in light of the development of traded models of service delivery (AEP, 2010). These principles highlight the importance of EP services continuing to meet the needs of service users by maintaining an accessible and ethical service delivery approach and are based on the professional and ethical guidelines that underpin the safe and effective practice of EPs, as set out by the British Psychological Society's (BPS)

‘Code of Ethics and Conduct’ (BPS, 2009) and the Health and Care Professions Council’s (HCPC) ‘Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists’ (HCPC, 2012).

The BPS (2009) ‘Code of Ethics and Conduct’ asserts that psychologists should be:

‘...honest and accurate in representing the financial and other parameters and obligations of supervisory, training and employment and other contractual relationships’

(BPS, 2009, p.21)

Within the traded service context, successfully trading with service users can be viewed as contingent on EP services being able to clarify the terms on which they are trading, to enable service users to be fully aware of the financial costs of buying into the service. This may be achieved through a contract which sets out the cost and what service users can expect from the EP service. This implies that EPs must clarify the service that will be delivered to ensure service users have clear expectations about what the EP service can provide.

This ethical principle links to research conducted into service users’ views about EPs (Farrell, et al. 2006) which highlight the lack of awareness that service users had about what the distinct role and contribution of EPs in supporting children, families and schools. Thus, clarifying expectations could be viewed as a positive step towards increasing awareness of the EP role and service delivery.

The HCPC (2012) 'Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists' states the that EPs should: *'understand the power balance between practitioners and clients and how this can be managed'* (p.6). This is an ethical principle which also has implications for EP practice within the traded context, particularly in regards to the possible shift in power and influence in favour of schools as they decide on the level of 'buy back' into the EP service. This could potentially develop into an area of tension if there is a sense that schools have greater power and control over the work and service delivered by EPs.

On the other hand, being aware that schools have increased choice and power regarding decisions related to buying into the EP service, could increase the demand for EP services, which is also indicated within research conducted into service users' views of EP service delivery (Kelly and Gray, 2000; Farrell et al., 2006), which found that many service users were dissatisfied with the lack of time available for school visits by EPs. Therefore, trading could provide an opportunity for schools to 'buy in' the time they would prefer in order to gain more EP time.

The HCPC (2012) also states that EPs should: *'be able to adopt a proactive and preventative approach in order to promote the psychological wellbeing of clients'* (p. 23) which could also be a challenge within the traded context if schools and services aim to direct EP involvement rather than negotiating work with EPs. This could be a consequence of trading with schools which could lead to EPs working reactively rather than working to promote psychological wellbeing in a preventative way.

As the relationship with schools changes to a customer-led dynamic, EPs' work maybe more explicitly directed by service users' needs, who may request specific commissioned pieces of work. Alternatively, EPs may be able to highlight the range and capacity within the EP service which may not have been evident to service users in the past, by incorporating marketing strategies in order to promote the EP role.

Marketing EP services to service users is a novel concept within the profession. Acklaw (1990) argues that marketing EP services relates to:

'...researching customer needs and designing services that will meet those needs. It is about shaping services towards the needs of the clients with the ultimate goal of benefitting the recipients of education services, namely children and students.'

(Acklaw, 1990, p. 15)

Acklaw's view suggests that service users are passive recipients of the service that EPs support, which is regarded as an '*unhelpful notion*' by Dowling and Leibowitz, (1994), who argue that emphasising service users lack of control and choice over the service that they receive directly opposes the notion of EPs working collaboratively with service users. They argue that this tension could be overcome through creating a collaborative approach to developing priorities for service users', which would be more effective to working cooperatively and also adhering to ethical and professional codes of conduct.

However, Dowling and Leibowitz (1994) assert that working according to the needs of service users may raise challenges for the profession:

‘...an indiscriminate responsiveness to customer demands is likely to quickly lead the profession into ethical dilemmas’

(Dowling and Leibowitz, 1994, p.248)

Thus, EPs need to consider how to overcome the challenges of meeting the needs of service users, whilst not compromising on the ethical and professional standards that are central to the EP role. Sharing service priorities and their capacity for traded work with service users may be the first step taken to balance service users’ demands with EP services’ expectations. As traded EP service delivery develops, educational psychology will need to centre on maintaining professional standards whilst ensuring effective and efficient practice for engaging service users and ensuring the sustainability of the service.

2.5 Systems Approaches to Developing EP service Delivery

As EP services undergo radical changes to become traded or part-traded services, the emphasis on structuring changes at the organisational level will increase. In order to support developments at the organisational level, some writers advocate the use of organisational development frameworks such as systems approaches (Burden, 1999; Stobie 2002; Stobie et al., 2002; Pellegrini, 2009; Fallon et al., 2010) in order to utilise a coherent and structured process for large-scale changes.

The DfEE (2000) and Farrell et al., (2006) recognised that EPs are able to effectively support work at a strategic, whole organisational level within schools; therefore it could be argued that the skills EPs use to help bring about change in other organisations could also be used to facilitate the shift from an LA-funded EP service, to a traded EP service. The following sections examine systems approaches for organisational development in order to view how these frameworks could be used to help EP services with organisational issues related to the shift to traded service delivery.

2.5.1 Systems Work

Systems work was identified by Burden (1978) as originating from systems theory, which he referred to as:

*...a 'way of replacing a piecemeal approach by one that attempts to look at problems **in their overall context.**'*

(Burden, 1978, p. 118, emphasis in original)

Burden suggested that viewing problems within the broader context and environment in which an organisation, such as a school or LA, are situated could help the EP to understand where the underlying issues stemmed from and, consequently, the EP could then offer strategies which would be contextually relevant for all those working within that organisation. In order to achieve this level of awareness, Burden looked to approaches developed beyond the remit of educational psychology, to the domains of sociology, industry and systems theory. As the notion of working at the

organisation level, to bring about change for all individuals within an organisation, began to be utilised by EPs, during the 1980s and 1990s, systems work and approaches began to rise in popularity as a key aspect of EP service delivery (Stratford, 1990; Gersch and Noble, 1991; Stoker, 1992; Burden, 1994).

Thomas (1992) asserted that although systems approaches have developed from different ideologies, the views professed by systems theory, which underpin these approaches, are regarded to be congruent with Educational Psychology, and he further added that:

‘Educational Psychologists require strategies which start from the problem in context. Strategies which are forced by a formulation of the problem constructed out of a body of experimental knowledge are less likely to be helpful’

(Thomas, 1992, p.53)

Stobie (2002) argued that EP services, similar to other organisations, exist within *‘the context and ecology of other systems’* (p.206). Therefore, change and development could occur due to factors that were either external to the service, such as changes in the broader political agenda, or internal to the service, such as dissatisfaction in the profession, or the use of a new paradigm, which may be resisted or adopted, leading to change in the system.

2.5.2 Systems Models for Organisational Development

As management and organisational psychology became established into EPs' thinking about working within organisations to bring about change, specific models for conceptualising organisations and organisational development were introduced to the profession (Thomas, 1987; Phillips, 1990; Fox and Sigston, 1992). Fox (2009) described two models for organisational change that were developed by EPs for systems work which drew on ecological perspectives in order to lead to organisational change.

These were System Supplied Information (SSI) (Myers et al., 1989) which later evolved into the Research and Development in Organisations (RADIO) approach (Timmins et al., 2003) and Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland, 1981) developed and promoted for EP practice by Frederickson (1990a; 1990b) and colleagues from University College, London. The following sections examine these approaches in greater detail.

2.5.2.1 *System Supplied Information and RADIO*

The Research and Development in Organisations (RADIO) approach to organisational change was based on the work by Myers et al., (1989) who developed

Systems Supplied Information (SSI), which was a set of materials used alongside a process model of change for educational settings in order to evaluate their organisational needs and create a plan of action to meet the identified needs of the organisation. Stoker (1992) asserted that SSI was a useful tool for schools to use in order to survey their own needs, but the approach required all staff members (stakeholders) to be actively involved in the process of analysis, otherwise it was suggested that the likelihood of organisational change would be significantly reduced (Stoker, 1992, p.16).

The RADIO model, (Timmins et al., 2003) further developed the processes identified within SSI and set out twelve phases, which could be revisited in an iterative manner. Phases one to four focus on identifying the needs of the organisation being analysed, phases five to eight relate to the research itself, where information is gathered and processed with stakeholders and, following agreed actions, phases nine to twelve centre on the organisational change process and the evaluation of action. The RADIO approach can accommodate both qualitative and quantitative research designs, which are dependent on the change that is required and also on the EP who acts as the research facilitator throughout the RADIO process.

Within the literature, RADIO has been used to evaluate a local authority behaviour support initiative (Timmins et al., 2003) and has been used to improve the transition to high school (Ashton, 2009). As a model for organisational development created by EPs, the literature relating to the effectiveness of the approach is limited to the EP

domain and Ashton (2009) also mentions the length of the process which hindered further iterations of the approach.

2.5.2.2 *Soft Systems Methodology*

Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) (Checkland, 1981) is an approach developed for use by EPs, by Frederickson (1990a) and her colleagues, to work with organisations in order to promote change. This methodology developed through a programme of over one hundred action research projects, from which the essential nature of SSM was formed as a seven stage iterative process.

Stages one and two involve the 'expression' phase (Checkland, 1999), where information is gathered to form the richest picture possible of the situation in which there is perceived to be a problem. SSM focuses on 'the problem situation', rather than examining the problem itself, which Checkland suggests can be diffuse and not explicitly stated (Checkland, 1999).

Stages three and four of SSM analyse the problem situation by building models of systems which may be relevant to improving it (Jones and Frederickson, 1990). These systems are built using the minimum number of activities required for the system to function. In stages five to seven the activity models are compared with the

problem situation in order to ascertain desirable and feasible actions which could be implemented to generate change within the organisation.

The application of SSM both outside the domain of EP practice (Checkland, 1981; 1999; Checkland & Poulter, 2006) and within educational settings (Frederickson, 1990a, Jones and Frederickson, 1990) has shown that the approach has been effective in a range of settings. In more recent research, specific SSM techniques have been utilised in order to elicit and analyse information to enable organisational development (Bettle et al., 2001; Gersch et al., 2001; Baxter and Frederickson, 2005; Cameron, 2006; Balchin et al., 2006; Turner et al., 2010).

In summary, systems approaches have been developed and used by EPs which can be used as frameworks for supporting organisational change and development. Just as EPs are able to apply such approaches to developing other organisations, these could be used to develop and improve EP service delivery, particularly in light of the changes and shift towards traded models of service delivery. The systems approaches mentioned in this section emphasise the importance of working with stakeholders in a collaborative, transparent way in order to affect change and improve outcomes for organisations as a whole. Thus, any change within EP service delivery models should take all EPs views into account, across the service, utilising an approach to organisational change which incorporates all perspectives.

2.6 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has examined the literature pertaining to EP service delivery. Large scale reviews of EP service delivery (DfEE, 2000; Farrell, et al., 2006) have highlighted that schools and other service users value EPs as highly skilled professionals, however on-going concerns are stressed within the literature concerning the limited time of EPs in schools and defining the unique contribution of the EP profession.

Models of EP service delivery (time allocation, SLAs and consultation) have highlighted the importance of collaborative, transparent practice, which is currently further implicated by the impetus towards marketing and trading EP services, where 'value for money' and efficiency are increasing priorities for EPs. Systems approaches, which have been adapted for EP work at an organisational level, in order to bring about change on a larger scale, could provide a framework for EPs to develop service delivery models by ensuring the views of all stakeholders are gained from across the service.

In relation to the current study, my research interest lay in investigating EPs' perceptions regarding the traded service delivery model in one EP service, in order to elicit some of the implications for EPs working within a traded model. Soft Systems Methodology was the methodology adopted to elicit EPs' views, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, along with further details of the study itself.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter presents the methodological considerations for the present study which aimed to gauge Educational Psychologists' (EPs') perceptions of traded service delivery, through the application of Soft Systems Methodology (SSM).

This chapter begins by examining the context in which the present study was conducted, followed by a discussion regarding the researcher's philosophical stance adopted within this study and how this has informed the methodology and methods employed. Reliability, validity and ethical factors are also considered, concluding with details regarding the method and process of data analysis.

3.1.1 Context of the Study

The aim of the present study was to explore EPs' views regarding the model of service delivery employed within the EP service in which I was placed, as a trainee EP, during the second and third year of the doctoral training. The rationale for choosing this area was due to its pertinence to this particular EP service, as it had undergone a transition from being an entirely centrally-funded LA service, to a

service that schools were able to purchase, depending on the level of support required.

The traded service delivery model, developed within this EP service enabled schools to purchase support from the EP service, through buying a package of credits that equated to EP time in school, based on the level of EP support required. Thus, the level of EP support required was purchased for the following year (from the beginning of April to the end of March the following year). However, within this service, at the time of writing, statutory work continued to be funded by the LA.

The AEP (2011) report entitled: *'The Delivery of Educational Psychology Services'*, sets out three models of service delivery in EP services (see Chapter 2, Figure 1) that have primarily developed due to the political and economic changes brought about by the Coalition Government. The EP service focused on in this study could be most accurately described as the *'local authority plus model'* (AEP, 2011, p.3) which alludes to the EP service providing a traded service to schools and other services, but continues to be funded by the LA for statutory work.

At the outset of my placement, in September 2011, the Principal EP discussed the need to gauge the views of the EPs within the service, concerning the traded service delivery model, in order to ensure its effectiveness and to highlight any problems within the model. Questions arose about how this could be undertaken in an

organised way which would, firstly encapsulate issues arising from this model of service delivery, and then explore ways to act on these issues to ensure the service delivery model continued to meet the needs of the service users and whilst meeting the professional and ethical guidelines that apply within the EP profession.

3.1.2 Rationale

Chapter Two described the evolution of the EP profession and the large-scale reviews of the EP profession which highlighted the developments in EP service delivery over the years. The shift to trading is a new direction for the profession as a whole and although EPs acknowledge these changes, there are also inevitable issues which impact on the EP role and professional practice. Hill (2013) claims that:

‘...the discord between psychological and political / legislative influences has led to polarised views, opinions and practices within the profession. Furthermore the inherent tensions between being a professional psychologist and an employee of the state is not insignificant.’

(Hill, 2013, p.24)

Hill's (2013) quote above highlights the pressures for EPs working as professional psychologists within a public servant role as part of the LA. In this regard, developing a traded element could be viewed as a positive move, which reduces the tensions that accompany working for the state. Nevertheless, developing services based on social enterprise principles of marketing and trading brings a new set of challenges to the EP profession.

To address the potential challenges of operating within a traded service delivery model, examining the perceptions of EPs who are immersed in working in this way would enhance understanding of this model and its implications for EP practice. From the standpoint of the current social and political climate, as EP services increasingly move towards developing traded elements or wholly traded services, there is much to be gained through gauging EPs' perceptions of traded service delivery, particularly as the EP profession endeavours to adapt and adjust within the rapidly changing educational landscape (Allen and Hardy, 2013). Taking these points into consideration, the focus for the present study centred on investigating EP's perspectives of a traded service delivery model operating within one EP service, with a view to extending knowledge on traded service delivery through an examination of the potential challenges arising from working within this model.

3.2 Philosophical Stance

This small scale study is conducted using qualitative methods, which reflect the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher regarding what is acknowledged to be the 'nature of knowledge' (Crotty, 1998, p.8). It is argued that:

'...qualitative research is not a homogenous field. There are a number of epistemological positions within which the qualitative researcher can work and many different methods of analysis'

(Madill, et al., 2000, p.2)

Thus, it is necessary that the philosophical stance adopted within the research is rendered explicit to the observer, as the methodology and methods utilised are founded on the researcher's view of the nature of knowledge and how this knowledge can be accessed.

3.2.1 Ontology and Epistemology

Qualitative social research is defined by Parker (1994) as: '*the interpretative study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made.*' (p.2). Thus, the emphasis is placed upon gaining meaning by drawing inferences, which is criticised by some researchers as being too subjective, and therefore not as reliable a mode for scientific investigation as positivism, which was the traditionally espoused ontological position held within social research up until the past three decades (Madill, et al., 2000).

Positivism is viewed as the epistemological stance which is most closely associated with an objective ontology. Positivism suggests a more rigorous investigative approach, by endeavouring to test hypotheses in order to find scientific explanations (Blaikie, 1993), however many writers have questioned the ability of such research to produce outcomes that are reliable and objective within a social science research context (e.g. Danziger, 1990, Harré and Secord, 1972; Manicas, 1987; Sherrard, 1998). Criticism is also aimed at this position for claiming that every researcher will

view 'reality' in the same way, asserting that facts and values are separable entities, hence claiming that positivist research is value-free (Robson, 2011, p.21).

In contrast to the objective ontological position of the positivist stance, interpretive epistemological approaches hold that meaning is created through actions and that individuals actively engage in constructing their social world. This stance suggests that rather than viewing the world as a fixed entity, knowledge and learning is derived from social situations which are fluid and dynamic, (Cohen, et al., 2011, p.17). This stance posits that theory is 'grounded' in the data generated (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and is emergent from the research (Cohen et al., 2011).

This ontological position views the social world as being in a state of flux and conflict, where values are governed by power and research aims to provide a meaningful representation of reality in order to stimulate discussion and bring about change (Cohen et al., 2011). This stance asserts a multiple reality world-view and stresses that meanings and interpretations of the world are constructed through the social world in which we exist. The notion of being immersed in and deriving meaning from the social world is asserted by the social constructionist position (Crotty, 1994).

The present study aims to explore perceptions of issues arising from working within a specific model, i.e. a traded service delivery model, and although the stance could be taken that service delivery is a 'real' entity which could be understood from an

objective, value-free position, my stance as the researcher and the argument proposed within this thesis is one of discovering the world-view of the individuals working within the traded model and exploring how this model is interpreted by the EPs immersed in this way of working. However, as the methodology used within this study, Soft Systems Methodology, provides a structured framework within which participants' views are gained, this places limitations on the extent to which individuals' world-views can be elicited, thus, the philosophical stance adopted cannot be defined as purely interpretivist. Critical Realism acknowledges that human action is underpinned by intention and choice and that existing social structures can limit the ways in which individuals can act (Robson, 2002). This stance aligns well with this study and can be acknowledged as having some influence on the interpretivist stance taken within this study.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Soft Systems Methodology

The interpretivist position postulates that: *'the social world is the perceived world and experienced by its members, from the inside'* (Blaikie, 1993, p.176). Therefore, the role of the researcher and the purpose of the research are viewed as one that uncovers the tacit beliefs, intentions and understandings that direct individual's actions in the social world (Blaikie, 1993). Hence, choosing an appropriate

methodology, based on the philosophical position adopted by the researcher required a research methodology that focused on facilitating discussion and exploring the perceptions of the individuals within the organisation.

The context of the organisation, in this case the EP service, can be usefully viewed from a systems perspective, as a structure consisting of interacting elements which make up the organisation as a whole. It is the interacting elements within the larger organisation which comprise the situations that individuals have to deal with on a day-to-day basis (Checkland and Poulter, 2006).

Systems' thinking postulates that any system, organisation or structure, is only as good as its parts, consequently in order to facilitate change within a system, any problematic situations that occur within specific parts of the system must be elicited and analysed before further action can be undertaken.

When taking these aspects into consideration, various organisational development approaches were considered for the purpose of conducting this research, which are outlined in Appendix 1. Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) (Checkland, 1981) was chosen as the overarching methodology for this study. SSM is described as an approach which:

' ...does not focus on the problem but on the situation in which there is perceived to be a problem, or an opportunity for improvement. The initial task is not to converge on a definition of a problem to solve, but to build up the

richest possible picture of the situation in question, drawing on the disparate perceptions of those involved.'

(Frederickson, 1990b, p. 139)

Thus, SSM aims to deal with situations where there is a sense that *"something needs to be done about this"*. Often these situations are described as messy and complex. Checkland (1999) refers to these as 'problematic situations' where the problem is not clearly defined and part of the process of analysis requires the problem situation to be analysed and defined before being acted upon. SSM is a highly structured process, which uses particular tools and techniques in order to focus and guide the participants in order to elicit detailed information about a particular problem situation. This aspect of the methodology closely aligns with the critical realist position which asserts that:

'Social structures such as language... permit persons to act meaningfully and intentionally while at the same time limit the ways in which they can act.'

(Robson, 2002, p.35)

SSM is as a process of social inquiry which seeks to work towards the improvement of a particular issue, through the articulation of a learning cycle that is based on systems concepts, in order to facilitate action (Checkland and Scholes, 1990). This methodology views social reality as a constantly changing outcome of social processes, a view that is in harmony with both the interpretivist and critical realist stance taken within this research. Checkland and Scholes (1990) assert that SSM maps onto Vickers' work on 'appreciative systems' (Vickers, 1965) which developed

the notion that individuals and groups selectively perceive and form judgements about the world around them. The nature of these judgements is associated with how relationships are developed and managed, rather than goal-seeking, and leads to views on how to act to maintain or modify these relationships.

3.3.2 The Nature of Soft Systems Methodology

SSM has been developed and refined as an approach to dealing with problematic situations over the past four decades and Peter Checkland is one of the key proponents of this approach (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Scholes, 1990; Checkland, 1999; Checkland & Poulter, 2006). SSM consists of a set of guidelines that can enable a researcher to work collaboratively with individuals within a particular organisation in order to develop an insight and in-depth knowledge of the issues at work. SSM captures learning through an organised process of inquiry, which is achieved through the creation of models based on purposeful activities and using these to question the real world problematic situation.

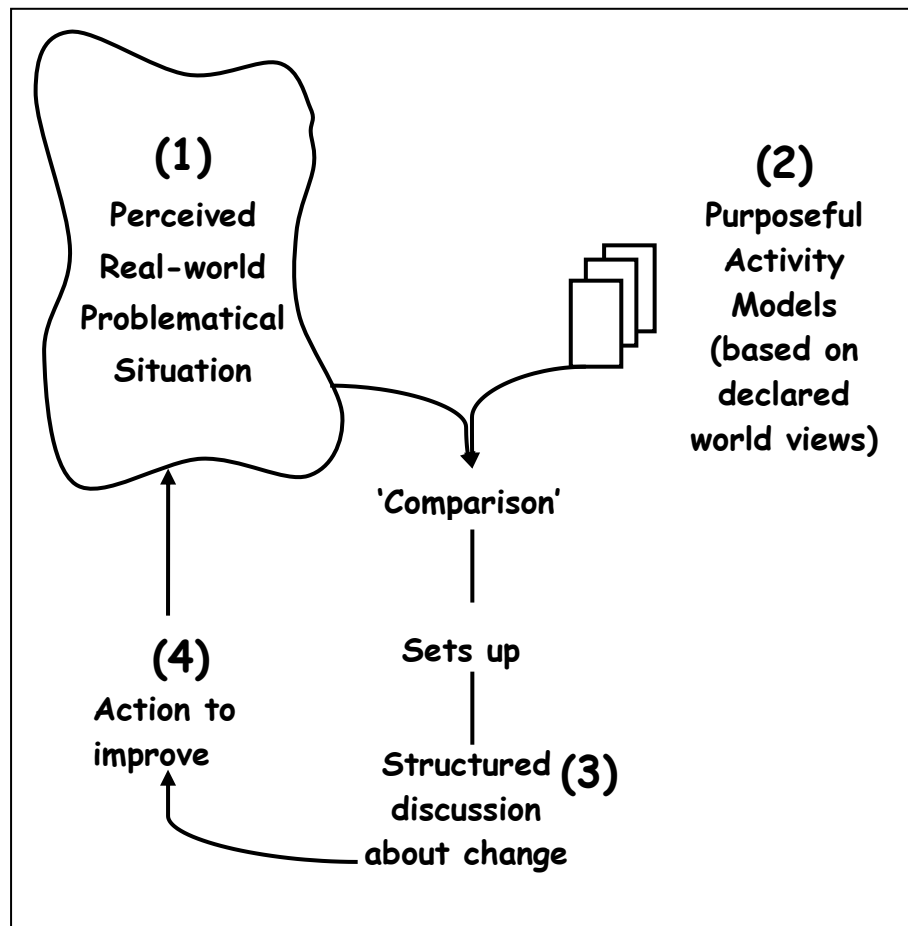
Checkland and Poulter (2006) state that activity models relate to:

*‘...**one way** of looking at complex reality. They exist only as devices whose job is to make sure the learning process is not random, but organized, one which can be recovered and reflected on.’ [Emphasis in original]*

(Checkland and Poulter, 2006, p.38)

SSM is described as an iterative learning process which moves from finding out about a problematic situation, through to defining the situation and then taking action to improve it, see Figure 2.

Figure 2.



The basic shape of SSM (Checkland and Scholes, 1990, p.7).

The learning cycle contained in SSM consists of four different types of activity, which are set out in Table 3, below. These four activities correspond to the basic shape of SSM and outline the key elements that the methodology utilises to ensure a

structured approach to exploring the problem situations within a particular organisation.

Table 3.

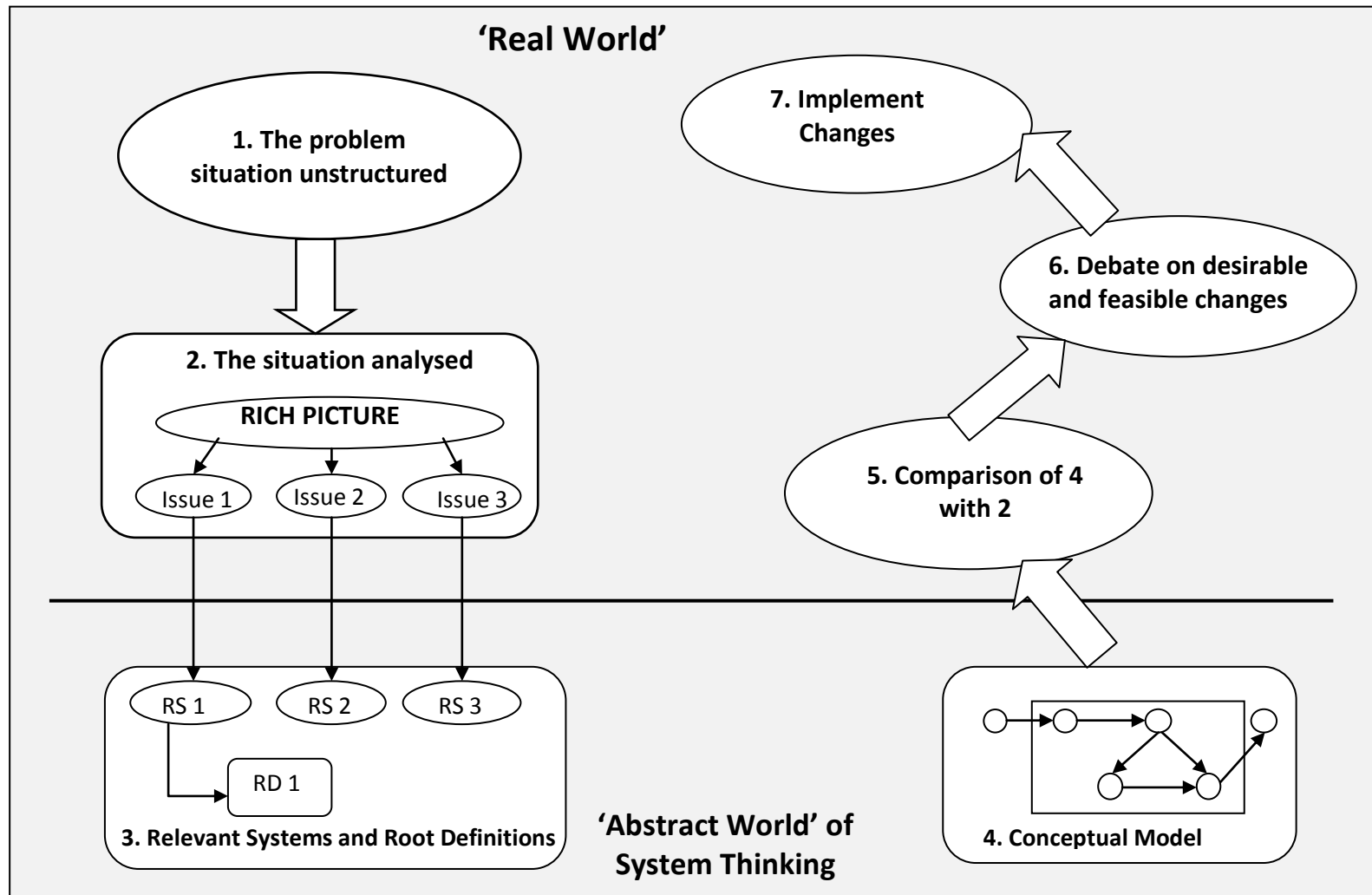
SSM stage	Activity	Details
1.	Finding out	Exploring and analysing the situation which is seen as problematical.
2.	Model building	Formation of some purposeful activity models judged to be relevant to the situation; each model being built on the basis of a particular worldview.
3.	Discussing and debating	Using the models to question the real situation. This brings structure to a discussion about the situation; the aim of the discussion is to find changes which are both desirable and culturally feasible within this particular situation.
4.	Defining or taking action	Defining or taking action to improve the situation. Since SSM is a cyclical process, some studies will be ended after defining the action, some after implementing it.

Activities contained within the SSM process (Checkland and Poulter, 2006, p.13-14).

Figure 2 illustrates the cyclical nature of SSM, which regards the four activities presented in Table 4 as part of an iterative process which assist with the elicitation of information to ensure that the steps taken towards actions to improve the problem situation are both desirable and feasible within the real world.

The basic shape of SSM, as outlined in Figure 2, was further developed by Frederickson (1990a) in order to further clarify the process for users. This is represented as a seven stage model in Figure 3.

Figure 3.



The Seven stage model of SSM (From Frederickson, 1990, p.3)

Figure 3 displays the seven stage model of SSM. The line drawn above stages 3 and 4 highlights that the divide between practical activities, situated in the 'real world', and theoretical activities, that occur in the abstract world of systems thinking.

The present study adopts the seven stage model of SSM, as set out in Figure 3 (above) as this model clearly illustrates the process and activities that take place at each stage. It can be argued that the seven stage model emphasises SSM as a linear process and reduces emphasis on iteration. However, the seven stage model is applied within this study for the following reasons:

1. The process described is clear for those unfamiliar with SSM.
2. The stages clearly reflect the activities that individuals are required to undertake in order to tackle a particular problem situation.
3. The clarity of the process facilitates transparency regarding the method and promotes the replicability of the study.

The seven stage model of SSM consists of activities that are conducted through a series of specific techniques that have been proven to be robust over time, and have been employed within a range of organisations in order to develop and further refine the approach (Checkland and Poulter, 2006).

The present study used the techniques advocated by the SSM process. Table 4 (below) sets out the techniques used within the SSM stages, and the steps taken within this study, to facilitate the process of eliciting problem situations and then developing conceptual models to improve practice. Prior to conducting this study an application for ethical review was completed, which sets out how the study would be conducted in adherence with ethical principles (Appendix 2). The following section provides a detailed account of the SSM process utilised within the present study.

Table 4.

SSM Stage	Techniques Used	Details of Technique	Steps Taken within this Study and Duration
1. The problem situation unstructured	Analysis of the problem situation	Analysis undertaken of the <i>context, social and political</i> aspects of the situation to identify important themes and issues.	1. Questionnaire emailed to all EPs in the service with questions based on the context, social and political aspects of the traded model. [2 week response time]
			2. Responses collated into table and shared with EPs at start of 1 st focus group. Ground rules and confidentiality within the group are also agreed.
			3. EPs asked to complete card sort activity to rank the areas addressed in questionnaire from most to least problematic. [10 minutes]
2. The problem situation expressed	Rich Picture	A drawing of the situation as it is, capturing the main issues and the multiple interacting relationships in pictorial representation.	4. 3 or 4 areas agreed by each focus group as most problematic are drawn out as a group onto a sheet of flip-chart paper. [20 minutes]
3. Relevant systems and root definitions	Relevant Systems	Naming a number of notional systems which may be of relevance to the problem situation.	5. Once Rich Picture is drawn, the sheet is put up on a wall for group to look at and to focus on a couple of particular areas which they view as relevant issues within the traded model
	Root Definition	A statement defining the relevant system which will be developed into a conceptual activity model.	6. An example of a conceptual activity model is also put up on a wall to illustrate how a root definition is formed using the PQR formula.
	The PQR formula	Provides the structure for the root definition: 'Do P, by Q to achieve R', where the formula answers the questions: what (P) how (Q) and why (R).	7. EPs develop 3 or 4 root definitions, using the PQR formula and write these onto flip-chart paper. This is done by EPs suggesting root definitions which are then written onto the sheet.

Table 4. Continued

SSM Stage	Techniques Used	Details of Technique	Steps Taken within this Study
3. Relevant systems and root definitions	CATWOE	6 key elements contained within any model of purposeful activity which enables further clarification of the root definition and relevant system. Customers, Actors, Transformation, Worldview, Owner, Environment	8. EPs asked to choose one Root Definition to focus on for the following focus group session.
			9. Once one Root Definition agreed, the CATWOE elements are elicited in relation to this definition through asking about each of the 6 elements in turn concerning the chosen definition. [steps 5- 9 = 15 minutes]
4. Conceptual model	Building a conceptual activity model	6 to 12 activities are placed in order to show the minimum number of activities required for the conceptual model to operate. This model is used as a conceptual construct to help structure debate.	10. 2 nd focus group session. EPs shown their Rich Picture and Root Definition to check whether this is still the agreed focus for the group. [10 minutes]
			11. The example conceptual activity model drawing is presented to the group again, to show how the model is structured
			12. EPs asked to brainstorm the activities required for the system underpinning the Root Definition using verbs to start each activity.
			13. Once brainstorm is complete, the EPs asked to agree which of the activities are necessary for this system to work effectively and these are drawn in a conceptual activity model. [steps 11 - 13 = 20 minutes]
5. Comparison of conceptual model with Rich Picture	The Rich Picture and conceptual activity model are compared.	Comparison of the rich picture and the 'conceptual' activity model to view mismatches and discuss areas that could be changed to improve an aspect of the problem situation.	14. Conceptual activity model and Rich Picture are pinned up side-by-side and comparison of both drawings is conducted through group discussion.
			15. Actions to improve practice are discussed and those to be further discussed with the whole EP service are agreed. [steps 14 & 15 = 10 minutes]

An overview of the techniques used within Soft Systems Methodology (partly adapted from Frederickson, 1999, p. 4-8, and using Checkland and Poulter, 2010, p. 219-224) and steps taken in this study.

3.4 Method

This section sets out the SSM process utilised within the current study which is based on the seven stage model of SSM set out in Figure 3. An overview of the method for this study is set out in Table 5 (below).

Table 5.

Stage of SSM	SSM Techniques	Method
1. The problem situation unstructured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of the problem situation. 	<p>Phase 1a: Open-ended questionnaire sent to all EPs within the service to receive information about the traded service delivery model as it is.</p> <p>Phase 1b: Responses from questionnaires collated and given to participants to stimulate discussion for Phase 2a.</p>
2. The problem situation expressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rich Picture 	<p>Phase 2a: 2 focus groups run in parallel over 2 sessions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st session focuses on expressing the problem situation, creating the Rich Picture Defining relevant systems using PQR and CATWOE to formulate some root definitions.
3. Relevant systems and root definitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant Systems Root Definition PQR formula CATWOE 	
4. Conceptual Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building an activity model 	<p>Phase 2b: Focus groups 2nd session.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A relevant system is selected by each group to focus on and an activity model is built to set out the logical activities required for the system to operate. This model is compared with the Rich Picture to instigate discussion about possible changes that may be needed. Next steps are also discussed.
5. Comparison of stage 4 with stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rich picture and conceptual activity model are compared. 	
6. Debate on desirable and feasible changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion about areas where change could occur and possible next steps. 	
7. Implement changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback to whole service to create an action plan 	

Overview of method utilised in present study and links to SSM stages and techniques.

3.4.1 Research Questions

The rationale for this study and the research questions reflect the philosophical stance and methodological choice adopted within this study (Crotty, 1994). This study aims to investigate the way in which EPs perceive the traded service delivery model within one EP service. SSM employs language and concepts that are unique to this methodology, such as the notion of a '*problem-situation*' which is used to describe *the 'complex interacting flux of changing events and ideas which unrolls through time'* (Checkland and Poulter, 2010, p. 191). This changing worldview, which is constructed through the situations that individuals perceive, emphasises the notion of perceptions being constructed and reinterpreted in differing ways over time. The focus of this research is one such example of the changing vision of the perceived world, where an organisation has undergone significant transitions and changed its core systems in order to adapt to the changes in the external environment.

This study aimed to address research questions that were developed from the methodological framework, rather than being drawn from the existing literature. This was viewed as an appropriate strategy due to the dearth of literature specifically relating to traded EP service delivery, and also due to the use of a structured methodology, to ensure that the study could facilitate further replicable research into traded service delivery within the EP profession in the future.

The SSM approach was therefore used to address the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What do EPs perceive as problem situations arising from the traded service delivery model?

This question would be tackled through SSM stages 1, 2 and 3 (see Figure 3), which would focus on an in-depth examination of the problem situations arising from the traded service delivery model.

Research Question 2: What relevant systems are perceived to be operating within the problem situation?

SSM stages 2, 3 and 4 develop the relevant systems within the problem situation, through firstly eliciting systems, then refining and describing them in detail through the creation of a conceptual activity model.

Research Question 3: What activities could help address the problem situation to help improve practice?

The specific activities which would be required for the conceptual activity model to successfully operate would be examined in stages 3, 4 and 5 where the activity model is created and then compared with the Rich Picture (formed in stage 2).

3.4.2 Participants

On commencing this research, the rationale for the study was initially discussed with the Principal EP of the EP service to clarify the scope and implications of the research. It was decided that it would be valuable to gauge as many EPs' views as possible on the traded service delivery model, as the first phase of the study, before moving on to a more detailed discussion with a sample of EPs from the service.

Following these initial discussions, an outline of the study, and its rationale, was shared with all EPs in the service during a service development day. This presentation can be found in Appendix 3. All EPs within the service were sent an email with an advertisement (Appendix 4) describing the study. A questionnaire was sent alongside this email to all the EPs. Completion of the questionnaire was both anonymous and voluntary. Following completing of the questionnaires, EPs were asked to volunteer if they would like to participate in phase 2 of the study. The total number of potential participants, including part time EPs, was fourteen EPs. Nine participants consented to take part in the study; four senior EPs and five main grade EPs.

It was decided to run two groups in parallel: a maingrade EP group (n=5) and a senior EP group (n=4), over two sessions, rather than a single focus group, to maximise the opportunity for participants to share their views with colleagues who

were of a similar professional position and also enable all participants to take part in the drawing activities.

It is argued that retaining homogeneity within focus groups reduces conflict and feelings of uneasiness which could occur due to implicit power hierarchies that are present within the group (Robson, 2011, p. 294). Therefore, two homogeneous groups were formed to enable participants to feel comfortable and safe in holding an open discussion, whilst promoting a sense of safety when discussing ideas, in order to gain a shared understanding of the topic being discussed.

The sample size for the focus groups accounted for 65 per cent of the EP service being studied, which is viewed as a percentage that is a broadly representative sample of the population under examination (Cohen et al., 2011). As the sampling technique was opportunistic, utilising a non-probability sample, the participants could not be viewed as a reliably representative sample of the population to the same extent that drawing on a random sample would have been. However, as a key aim of this study was to engage participants who would be willing to share their views, engaging volunteer participants increased the likelihood of honest engagement in discussing the issues within the focus groups.

3.4.3 Data Collection

The methods employed within this study needed to be amenable to SSM and facilitate the application of the techniques that the methodology employs to elicit participant's views. Questionnaires and focus groups were used as the methods for data collection as they could be easily incorporated within the various stages of SSM whilst continuing to implement its techniques. This also ensured that perceptions were elicited and recorded in an appropriate manner to enable a detailed qualitative analysis. The following sections examine the chosen data collection methods used in this study.

3.4.3.1 Questionnaires

As stated in section 3.4.2, phase 1 of this study required a method of data collection which would enable the collation of EPs' perceptions of the traded service delivery model. To achieve this an open-ended questionnaire was developed, utilising the SSM technique of analysing the problem situation based on questions used by Frederickson (1990) to elicit the political, cultural and social aspects within a system. The questionnaire is presented in Appendix 5, provided with an attached information sheet for participants. Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that open-ended questionnaires are a useful method for smaller scale research where honest and personal responses are required.

The use of open-ended questions are criticised for being lengthy to analyse and can lead to a poor response rate. Nonetheless, this type of questionnaire was viewed as an appropriate tool for this aspect of the study as the population from which responses could potentially be received was relatively small and the richness of responses would be used to stimulate discussion in the focus group.

The questions were based on the Frederickson's (1990a) guidelines of the SSM analysis of three key areas of the system being investigated: the context, social and political aspects. The questionnaire was piloted on a colleague within the service which led to some re-wording of the questions for clarity and an information sheet being attached to the questionnaire.

The total number of questionnaires emailed was 14 and the number of questionnaires returned was 9, which indicated a 64 per cent overall response rate. According to Mangione (1995) an acceptable response rate is considered to be a minimum of 60 per cent, therefore the response rate was considered to be acceptable and was deemed to show a good breadth of views from EPs across the service.

The questionnaire was an effective tool for this study as the responses required were generally one word answers, rather than sentences and as the questionnaire was self-completed, without the presence of the researcher, it was regarded that this

would allow participants to spend as much time as required to complete this and also reduce the potential pressure that participants can feel in the presence of the researcher (Cohen et al. 2011).

A limitation of self-completion questions is reported to be that the researcher is not available to respond to participants' queries regarding the questions (Cohen et al., 2011). To overcome this, all EPs were sent a covering letter with the questionnaire (Appendix 5), providing them with the personal contact details for the researcher so that questions could be answered at any point and as they arose.

The responses from all the questionnaires were collated into a table. Appendix 6 presents all the responses, including the frequency of responses given. Table 10 in Chapter 4 presents the responses provided to participants, where duplicated answers from questionnaires were not repeated in the table. EPs were not given an indication of the number of respondents that had stated a particular response to avoid biasing certain answers. Also responses which could identify individual EPs were not added to the collated table, in order to retain confidentiality and anonymity. The questionnaire did not require the completion of a consent form, as this was an anonymous and voluntary activity, and there was no follow up if the questionnaire was not returned. This was done to emphasise anonymity, which Robson (2011) asserts can encourage frankness when providing written responses on questionnaires.

3.4.3.2 *Focus Groups*

For phase 2 of the study, EPs were requested to state whether they would be willing to participate in focus groups via email, once they had completed the questionnaire. The participants who volunteered to participate in the focus groups were asked to read an information sheet on the purpose of the focus groups (Appendix 7) and then sign an informed consent letter (Appendix 8).

Within the focus groups, a script was used by the researcher in order to structure the SSM process within the focus groups and retain a consistent approach across both focus groups, see Appendix 9 for focus group script. The responses collated from the questionnaires were used to initiate discussion within two focus group sessions (see Chapter 4, Table 10). Once EPs had viewed the responses, a card sort activity took place using the nine focus areas of the questionnaire as statements that were ranked in order of least to most problematic (Appendix 10). This activity enabled the groups to highlight areas of concern that could be analysed in further detail using the Rich Picture technique.

Focus groups were chosen for the implementation of the SSM process for the following reasons:

- discussion between participants could be facilitated through the use of SSM techniques;

- interaction of the group would produce collective and individual responses and a shared worldview;
- the focused nature of the group would contribute to gaining insights which might not otherwise be available; and
- both incongruent and consistent views could be elicited and examined.

(Cohen, et al., 2011, p.436)

In terms of the appropriate number of participants within a focus group, Morgan (1998) suggests that between four and twelve people per group is an appropriate size. As mentioned earlier, in order to facilitate discussion and enable all participants to take part in drawing the Rich Picture and creating the Conceptual model, two focus groups were run in parallel, consisting of a group of maingrade EPs or focus group A, (n=5), and a group of senior EPs or focus group B, (n=4).

The focus groups were based on the key principles and techniques of SSM, in order to facilitate the process and discussion within a structured framework to ensure relevant points were covered within the one hour time allocated for each group. The focus groups were audio recorded, with participants being informed when the recording commenced and ended. As most participants were not familiar with the SSM process, time was allocated to allow for additional explanations regarding the techniques used. Thus, the duration for the main activities and allowances for time to enable recapping and clarifying of unfamiliar aspects of SSM were incorporated into

the structure of the groups. Table 6 sets out the general structure for the focus groups.

Table 6.

Session	Aim	Process	Outcome	Duration (mins)
1	To initiate discussion	Card sort activity	Most problematic areas elicited by the group	10
	To express the problem situation	Drawing the Rich Picture	Problem situation discussed and key areas highlighted	20
	To define one relevant system viewed as problematic	Discussion, using PQR formula and CATWOE	Creation of a root definition of one problem situation	15
2	To create a conceptual activity model for the root definition	Drawing key activities required for conceptual activity model	Creation of a conceptual activity model	20
	To compare the Rich Picture and conceptual model	Examination and comparison of both drawings through discussion	Identification of areas that need to be addressed	10
	To create an action plan	Discussion regarding how to move forward	Next steps identified	10

Structure and process for focus groups

The main limitations of the focus groups which needed to be addressed included:

- *The limited amount of time available* – This was addressed through close adherence to timings set out in the structure. The researcher stated the time allocated for each activity throughout the focus group sessions.

- *Keeping the group focused on the topic area being discussed* – The researcher's task was to facilitate the group, this included drawing the discussion back to the topic being discussed as appropriate. Due to the structured nature of SSM, retaining focus on the topic was easily manageable.
- *Ensuring all participants were included and able to voice their views* – This was facilitated by having small, homogeneous groups, who were familiar with one another and shared a similar position within the service. Robson (2011) suggests that homogeneity supports communication and promotes the exchange of ideas and experiences.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study were considered in detail and set out in the application for ethical review (Appendix 2) which was a prerequisite to conducting the research. Ethical codes of conduct (BPS, 2009; HPC, 2012) were adhered to, in order to ensure ethical practice throughout the research process. The key ethical considerations for this study are set out in Table 7.

Table 7.

Ethical Consideration	How were considerations addressed
Gaining Informed Consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the focus groups, informed consent was gained from each participant. EPs interested in participating were given an information sheet (Appendix 8) regarding the study, how information would be recorded, stored and reported. • EPs also received information about withdrawing consent. • After reading this information they were asked to give consent for participation.
Right to withdraw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information sheet given to participants, before they signed the consent forms (Appendix 8) outlined the option to withdraw from the study if they would wish to do so. • Participants were also informed at the start of the focus groups that they could withdraw before the audio recording commenced. • Any information related to the participant that withdraws would be removed and not included in the data analysis phase.
Confidentiality and Anonymity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher alone would have access to the completed questionnaires and the audio recording of the focus groups • Participants' names and personal information would not be recorded • Details of the individual EPs were not shared and made public. • The educational psychology service in which this study takes place would remain anonymous • Data would not be traceable to any participant, thus retaining anonymity. All information was regarded as confidential.

Key ethical considerations for this study.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

Qualitative research methods take a divergent stance on the principles of reliability and validity as compared with those of quantitative, positivist methods (Cohen et al., 2011). Within qualitative research it is asserted that the level of personal involvement and in-depth responses from individuals enables a high level of reliability and validity within the research, akin to the scientific rigour of quantitative research (Agar, 1993).

This view is contested by other writers (Hammersley, 1992; Silverman, 1993) who argue that undertaking in-depth research does not provide the qualitative researcher with a privileged position and the same level of rigour involved in quantitative research is required in qualitative research (Cohen, et al., 2011). In order to ensure reliability and validity in the study, Yin (2009) suggests four tests that are commonly used to verify the quality of the qualitative study. Table 8, below, presents the tests of validity and reliability, as asserted by Yin (2009), and the how these potential threats to the study outcomes were addressed throughout the study.

Table 8.

Tests	Research Stage	Addressed in the research
Construct validity <i>The extent to which the constructs used by the researcher are meaningful to the participants and how they view the world.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection – Questionnaires and focus groups • Data analysis & findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data from multiple sources was triangulated across all four focus groups. • Data and findings from thematic analysis checked and reviewed by participants of focus groups • A replicable process was used to structure the research (Soft Systems Methodology)
Internal validity <i>The extent to which the findings of the study can actually be sustained by the data.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection – Focus Groups • Data analysis & findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of thematic analysis to analyse data • Sharing findings with participants • Sharing thematic analysis process with colleagues to check process and emergent themes
External validity <i>The degree to which the findings can be generalised to the wider population, i.e. the transferability of the findings.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Design • Methodology Process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparent research design enables replicability of the study within different / similar contexts to compare findings. • Structured process used, following SSM, showing procedure utilised and how findings were established.
Reliability <i>The extent to which a subsequent researcher could replicate the study and arrive at the same findings and conclusions.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Design • Methodology process • Data analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SSM adheres to concept of 'recoverability' which asserts that the research procedure should be clear and well-structured and documented to enable the process to be followed. • Transparency, clarity and the structure of the process are emphasised throughout the research process.

Tests of validity and reliability and how these were addressed in the research (Adapted from Yin (2009), p. 41, and Cohen et al., 2011, pp. 180-188).

3.7 Data Analysis

3.7.1 Questionnaire Data

The responses from the questionnaire were gathered and collated into a table (see Appendix 6 for table) using each question as the headings for the table. Duplicated responses and responses which could identify a participant were removed and the data was presented to participants in a table (Table 10) at the start of the first focus group session in order to initiate the discussion.

3.7.2 Focus Group Data

The four focus group sessions (two sessions with senior EPs and two sessions with main grade EPs) were audio recorded to ensure all information elicited from the participants was utilised in the data analysis. The audio recording was transcribed and analysed in order to produce a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of EPs' perceptions, related to the context being examined, through the identification of themes. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was employed as the data analysis method in order to identify themes through the detailed analysis of the transcriptions. Braun and Clarke's (2006) model for thematic analysis was chosen as it offers a systematic procedure for engaging with and analysing the data collected.

Thus, further facilitating the replicability of the research process, this supports the reliability and validity of this study.

Thematic analysis can take an inductive approach; where the analysis is data-driven and no attempt is made to fit the process into a pre-existing model, or a deductive approach which is theory-driven. Deductive analysis limits the focus to specific aspects of the data, whereas the inductive approach retains a broad focus and enables themes to emerge from the data (Robson, 2011).

An inductive approach was adopted for the process of data analysis in the present study, as it focused on themes emerging from the data, which aligns with the philosophical stance of the present study and emphasises reality as constructed and interpreted through the perceptions of the individuals within the context being examined. This stance maintains the importance of discovering the worldview of the EPs working within the traded service delivery model and exploring problem-situations arising from the traded model and how these are interpreted by the EPs immersed in this way of working.

Table 9, below, sets out the phases of thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and how this phase was undertaken in the present study.

Table 9.

Thematic Analysis Phase	Process undertaken in study
1. Familiarisation with data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audio recording transcribed for content only• Transcriptions checked against recording and initial ideas noted.
2. Generating initial codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading and re-reading transcripts• Conversational turns systematically coded across all transcripts
3. Searching for themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Codes collated into potential themes• All relevant data gathered for each theme
4. Reviewing themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Checking themes against coded extracts.• Themes reviewed by participants• Generation of a thematic 'map'
5. Defining and naming themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refining the specifics of each theme• Generation of clear definitions for each theme.
6. Producing the report	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Selection of extracts that capture the essence of the themes• Linking analysis to research questions and literature

Phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006)

3.7.3 Reporting the Findings

Once the analysis of the entire data set had been undertaken and the final thematic maps were generated, the findings could then be interpreted and links between the data could be formed. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that questions should be asked of the data in order to go beyond the semantic level in order to facilitate the emergence of a story in relation to the research questions. In Chapter Four the

findings from the thematic analysis, along with the outcomes from the use of the SSM drawing techniques (Rich Picture and Conceptual Activity Models) are presented and further discussed.

Chapter 4

Results

Chapter 4

Results

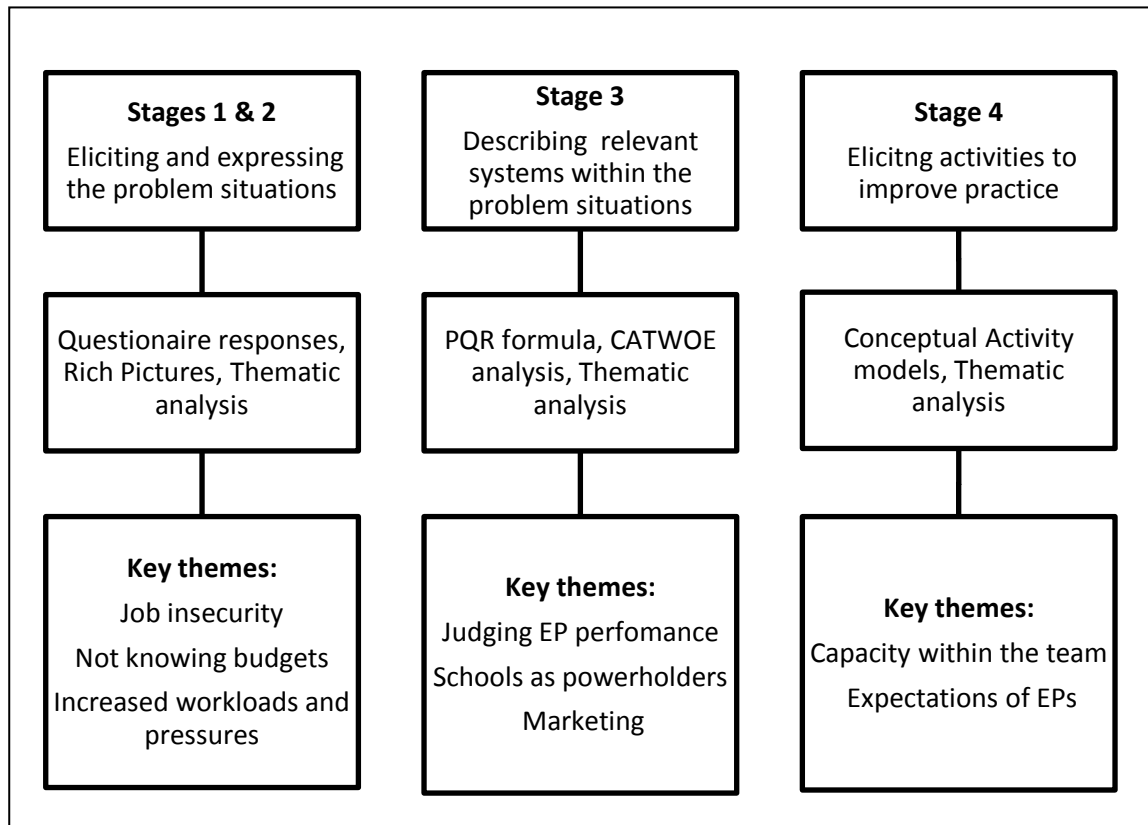
4.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter presents the themes emerging from the thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts alongside the outcomes from the SSM techniques applied within the focus groups, namely: the Rich Picture and Conceptual Activity Model drawings, the PQR formula and the CATWOE analysis, with SSM providing the overarching structure for the data analysis process. This chapter begins with an overview of the themes emerging from the thematic analysis and the techniques used in order to illustrate the structure for this chapter

4.1.1 Overview of Themes

The SSM techniques utilised within this study are set out in Chapter 3, Table 4. Figure 4 below, presents an integrated overview of the key themes that have emerged from the thematic analysis, from stages 1 to 4 of the SSM approach (See Table 5).

Figure 4.



Key themes emerging across SSM stages 1 to 4

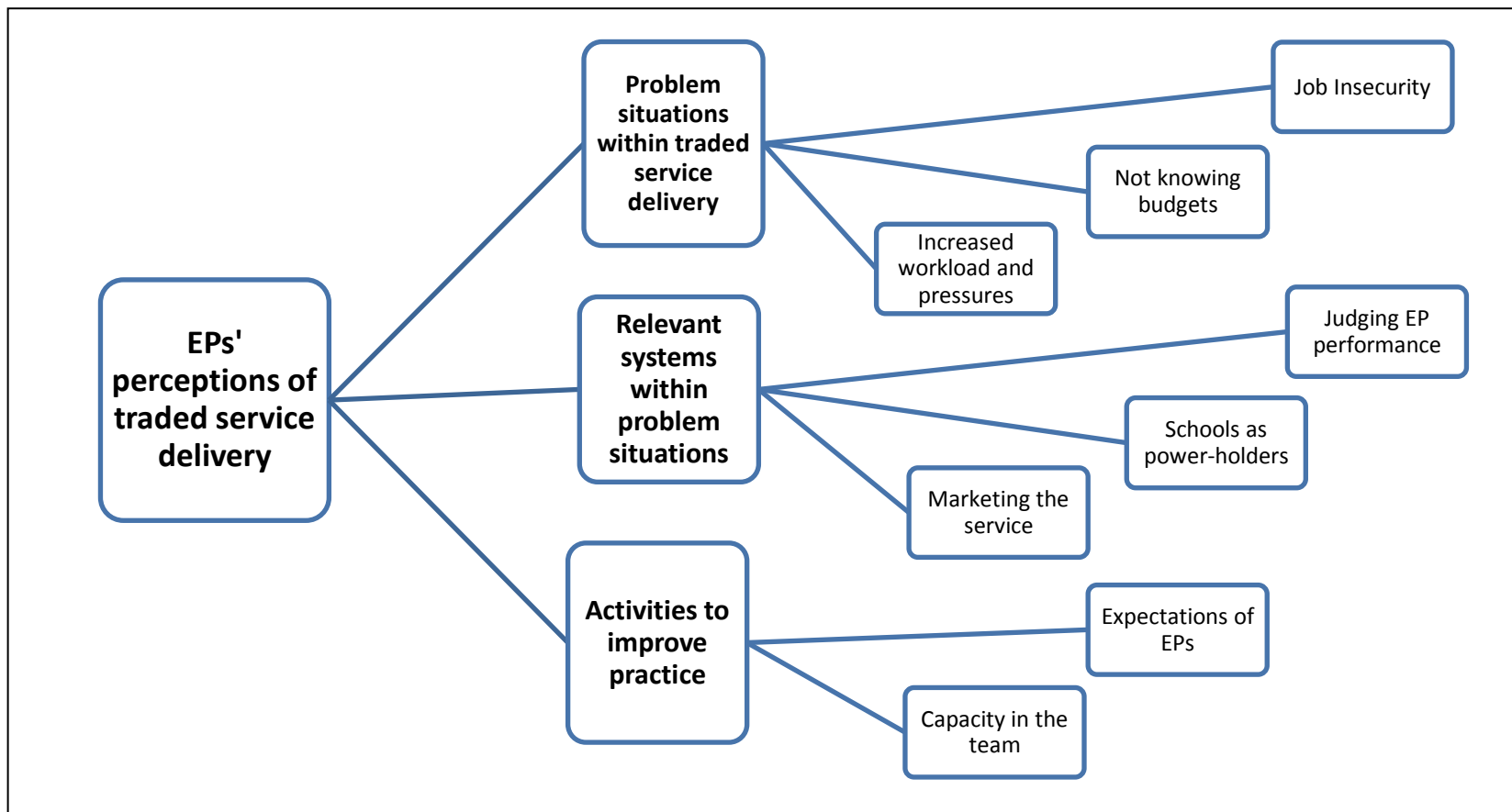
The following sections present the results from each SSM stage, as shown in Figure 4, above, from both the themes emerging from the thematic analysis and other data collected from the SSM techniques used within this study (e.g. Rich Pictures) in order to present the outcomes of this study in a clear and coherent structure. These results will be discussed in Chapter Five in relation to the literature reviewed earlier in Chapter Two. Three thematic maps are presented in order to provide an overview of the themes emerging at each stage of the data analysis and Figure 5, below, presents the final thematic map which provides an overview of the superordinate

themes emerging in relation to the three areas addressed by the research questions. Figure 4 shows the three superordinate themes emerging in relation to the problem situations arising within traded service delivery were: 'Job insecurity', 'Not knowing budgets' and 'Increased workload and pressures', which are discussed further in section 4.2.3.

Three superordinate themes also emerged in regards to the relevant systems within the problem situations, which were: 'Judging EP performance', 'Schools as power-holders' and 'Marketing the service', which are presented and discussed in section 4.3.3.

In regards to the activities to improve practice, two superordinate themes emerged: 'Expectations of EPs' and 'Capacity in the team' which are further discussed in section 4.4.2.

Figure 5.



Final Thematic Map

4.2 SSM Stages 1 & 2: Eliciting and Expressing Problem Situations

The first two stages of SSM focused on gaining an understanding of what the EPs perceived to be some of the problem situations arising from the traded service delivery model. To gain a broad initial understanding of EPs' perceptions, a questionnaire was emailed to each EP in the service. The responses were collated in a table, Table 10, to share with participants during the first focus group sessions. The nine areas that the questionnaire focused on were used as part of a card sort activity in order to rank the most problematic to least problematic issues related to traded service delivery. This activity enabled EPs to discuss the most problematic situations and illustrate these in the Rich Picture. Outcomes from the questionnaires and Rich Pictures are presented in this section followed by a presentation of the key themes arising from the thematic analysis concerning the problem situations.

4.2.1 Questionnaire Responses

The questionnaire aimed to examine the traded service delivery model, without attempting to analyse the responses provided, as these would initiate the discussion within the first focus group session. The responses from the questionnaires, which were collated and presented to participants, are shown in Table 10. Appendix 6 presents the raw data collected from the questionnaires, which also shows the frequency of each given response. The frequency of responses was not shared with

participants in the focus groups in order to prevent any bias in participants' perceptions based on the most popular responses given. Any unique responses which could threaten participants' anonymity were also removed from the table of responses provided to participants, Table 10, below.

Table 10.

Client / Problem-Owners	Problem-Solvers	Rules In System
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Young People • Family Schools and Staff Community • Other Agencies (CAMHS & LACES) • LA (Statutory Work) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPs / TEPs • School staff • Parents • Children and Young People • EPS Admin Staff • Other Agency Professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Schools request • Agreed Service delivery • Time constraints • EPs accountable to clients • Statutory deadlines & duties • Maintaining relationships with clients
Roles in The System	How EP Performance is Judged	Expectations of EPs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible to meet changing demands • Access to provision and resources for CYP • Good communicator • Interpersonal skills • Psychological knowledge • Supervisor / Supervisee • Trainer • Assessor • Consultant • Facilitator • Marketing and development of service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of buy-back • School feedback – evaluation forms • Evaluation of training delivered • Performance management in supervision • Paperwork • Statutory duties met to deadlines • Continuing professional development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To meet demands of school's buy-back • Deliver service that schools want more of • Keep schools happy • Apply psychology in the system • Statutory Duties • Reliable service • Account for use of time • Credit planning meetings • Good relationships with clients • Follow service guidelines
Sources of Power	Access and Control of Information	Environmental Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools / HTs/ SENCo's • School's budgets • LA / Director of LA / Children's Service Managers • Perceptions of EPS as a traded service – efficient & Cost Effective • EPs have to be sales people and market service • ECPS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools/ LA not knowing budgets • Inaccurate referral information • LA Protocols/ data protection / child protection • Parental consent • Restrictions on developing service in new markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government / LA Budget cuts • Staff shortages • Changes in national policy and legislation to statutory role • Further development of service delivery model • Schools as clients and purchasers • Schools more demanding about how service is delivered • Good quality admin

A summary of the responses collated from the questionnaires

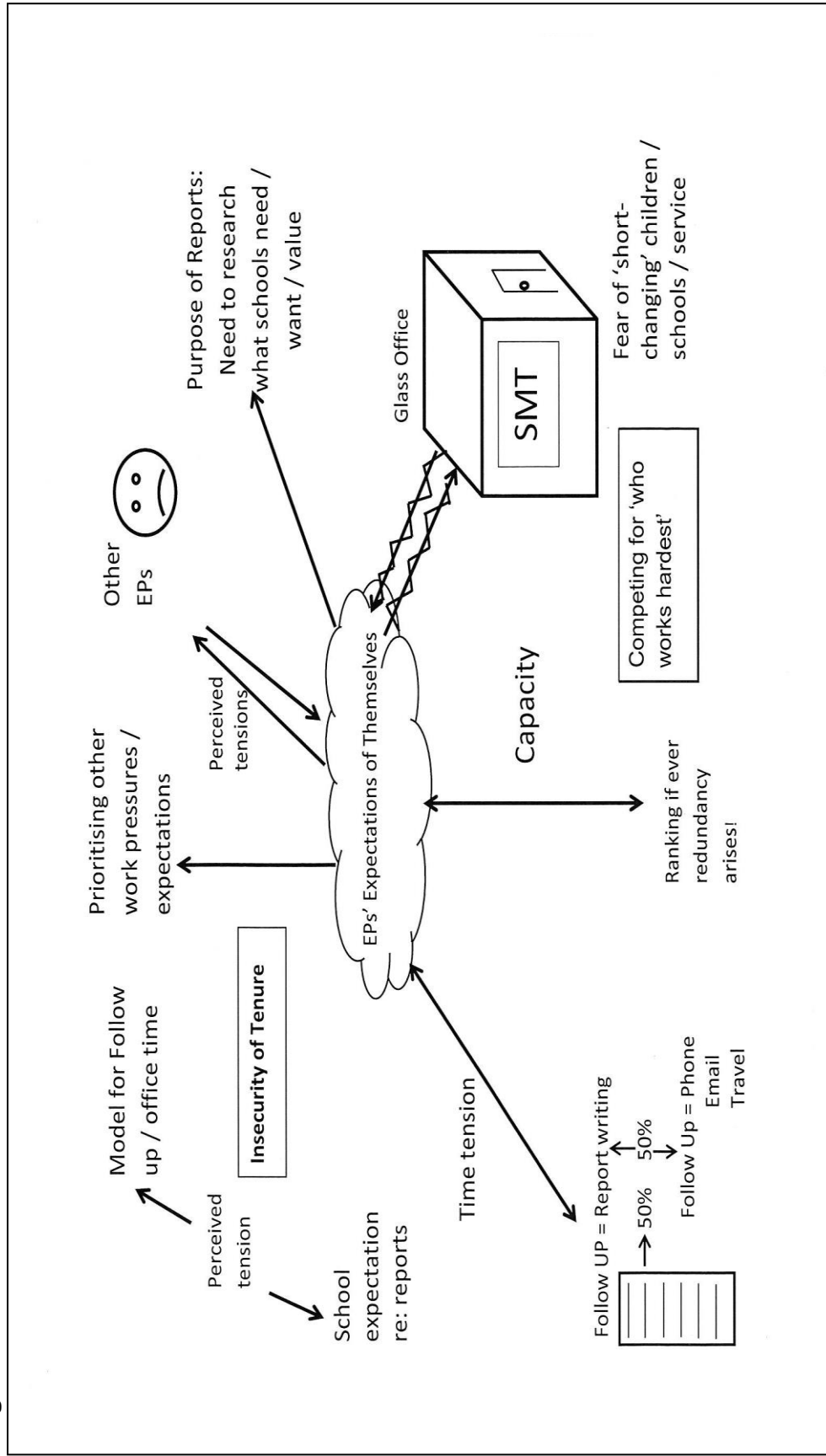
4.2.2 Rich Pictures

The Rich Pictures were created within each focus group, as a collaborative effort, to visually capture the main concerns and to recognise the multiple relationships between the different elements at work within the traded service delivery model. The Rich Pictures were drawn whilst the focus groups were being audio-recorded, therefore the Rich Pictures should be viewed alongside the thematic analysis (Section 4.2.3) in order to gain a holistic understanding of how these themes relate to the service delivery model as a whole system. Figures 5 and 6 present the Rich Pictures created by focus group A and B, respectively.

The Rich Pictures have been re-created on the computer to retain the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, whose writing or drawings may have been recognisable to other EPs in the service.

Rich Picture created by focus group A

Figure 7.



Rich Picture created by focus group B

4.2.3 Key Themes

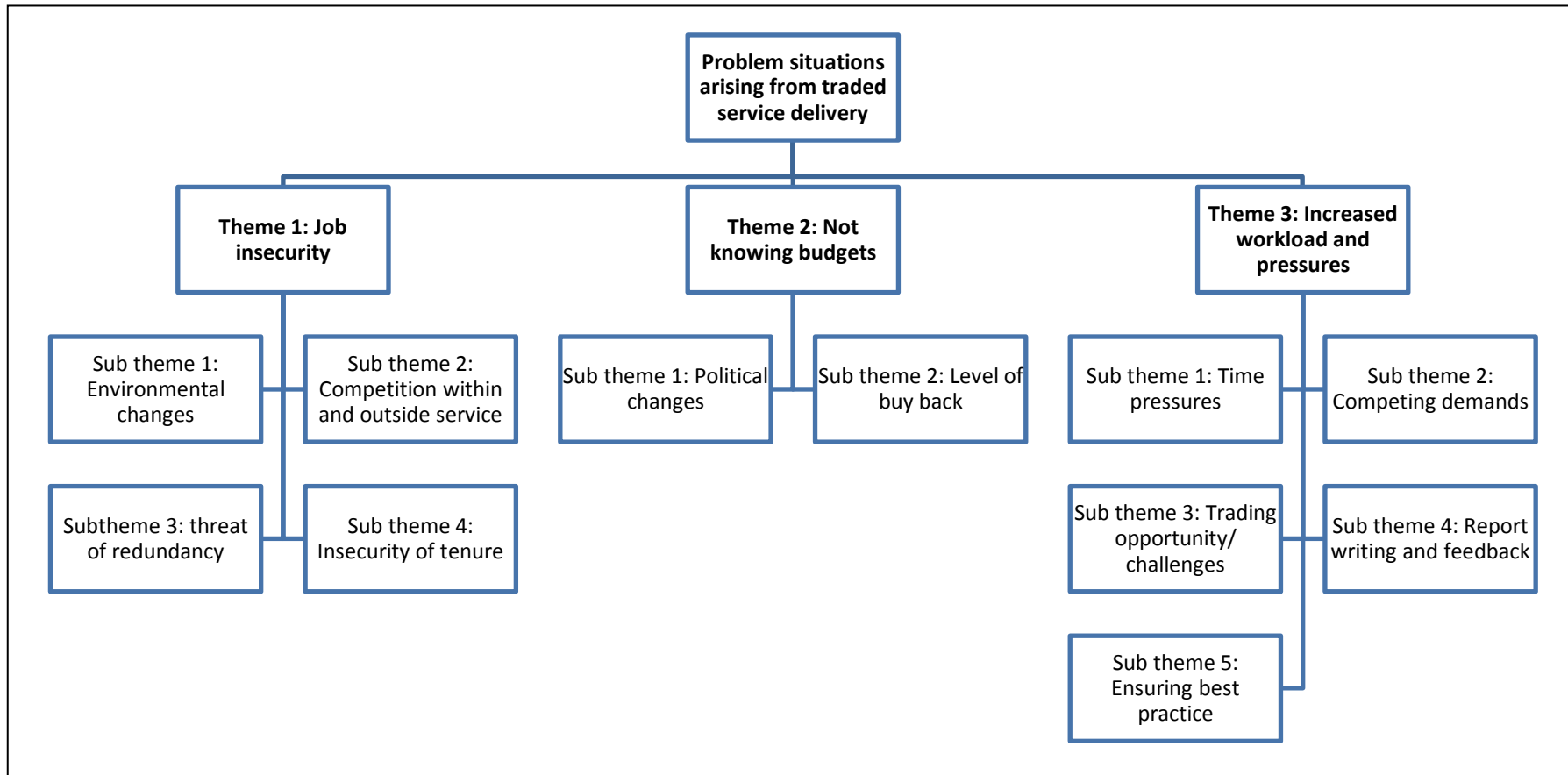
Thematic analysis was adopted as the method of data analysis for the audio recordings of all four focus group sessions. An inductive approach to the thematic analysis was applied, as this focuses on themes that emerged from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) which progressed from description to interpretation. The themes identified were those that I felt captured the key issues arising from EPs' perceptions of the traded EP service delivery model in relation to the research questions, thus the process of selecting data was recognised as a subjective process. The following sections present the superordinate and subthemes emerging from the thematic analysis, where maingrade EPs are labelled as P1 to P5, Senior EPs are S1 to S4 and the researcher's comments are labelled R.

Themes are illustrated with data extracts, which are presented in boxes throughout this chapter, and display sequences of comments taken from transcripts of the focus groups. Some extracts related to more than one theme; therefore there is overlap across the superordinate and sub themes that emerged from the thematic analysis.

From the thematic analysis three superordinate themes emerged in relation to the problem situations perceived within traded service delivery: *Job insecurity*, *Not knowing budgets* and *Increased workload and pressures*. The following sections examine each theme in turn by viewing the sub themes comprising each

superordinate theme. Figure 8, below, provides an overview of the superordinate and subthemes emerging from the thematic analysis.

Figure 8.



Thematic Map 1: Themes relating to the problem situations arising from traded service delivery

4.2.3.1 Theme 1: Job Insecurity

Job insecurity was a key theme running through the discussions with both focus groups. It was suggested that the traded service delivery model had been developed in order to reduce the chances of EPs being made redundant and to secure people's jobs. Within this theme, four sub themes emerged which expand and elicit a deeper understanding of the problem situations related to *Job insecurity*. The four sub themes are: *Environmental changes*, *Competition within and outside the service*, *Threat of redundancy* and *the Insecurity of tenure*.

Sub-theme 1: Environmental changes

Participants in focus group A (FGA) perceived changes in the environment, such as the change in Government, to have brought about the need for the traded service delivery model, which underlined the sense of job insecurity:

P3: I think a lot of the rules in the system are some of the difficulties we experience at the moment in terms of the time pressures that are associated with having gone traded... The fact that we're now delivering the traded work but the statutory work's still there

P5: I know it's competing demands really

P3: Yes and I suppose all that came about because of the environmental factors in terms of the political changes you know prior to that we didn't have any of these issues, did we, so

P5: If it wasn't for that

P1: Yes it's kind of like saying that everything else hinges on this

P4: Yeah I think that is for everything

Focus group B (FGB) suggested that the changes experienced within the EP service were part of the larger picture of environmental changes that were widely affecting people's ability to gain and retain jobs:

S3: We've been under so much pressure, it's not just within this team I think... the country's under pressure there's one and a half million people unemployed the international labour organisation say that if we don't re-inflate and you know all that sort of stuff and people say the real problem is what's going to happen to... the Eurozone... so there's an awful lot of pressure all the time in the news you know we are in very hard times.

Participants in FGB asserted that the lack of clarity from central Government concerning the EP role influenced the job insecurity currently experienced, and one Senior EP argued that this was due to broader changes in market forces alongside the political agenda:

S3: I think that the fundamental problem is the question of what do you actually need Ed Psych's for... and the local authorities need I think a blue print for what they want people to do and that is the role, you know... it was quite clear thirty years ago what our role was but at the moment because of all these financial problems and because this is the way that they are tackling it, which I don't think is the best way... it seems that the market forces are dictating work. I think its market forces versus central planning.

Thus, changes in the broader environment were perceived to be exacerbating the sense of insecurity about EPs' jobs and whether the EP profession would be a priority that the government would want to retain in the future.

Sub theme 2: Competition within and outside the service

The EPs in FGA focused on private EPs and being judged by other services as the main areas of competition that they felt they added to their insecurity about their jobs:

P2: We have got a lot more private EPs picking up our schools.. Are we judged by other services as well? because ultimately we're looking to trading outside of schools into other services, so Looked after Children, I'm trying to make links with the Youth Offending Service. So I wonder whether our performance is judged by other services and then they choose whether they want to...

P4: Yeah so it's not just schools

P5 : But on the other side because we're traded, ...you're not wanting to step on other services toes because they're also traded.

Whilst FGA focused on the competition from outside the EP service, participants in FGB suggested that there was also a significant level of competition within the EP service which was argued to relate to the threat of redundancy, which meant EPs felt a growing emphasis on needing to show their effectiveness as practitioners:

S2: I think there is competition out there

S1: Do you think I didn't

S2: I think people do compete they compete to be the ones who are the most busy do the most delivery

S3: I've always thought there's been a ...competitiveness within the service but the problem here is that the competitiveness is underlined by S2's watermark in that it's a very different competition there has been competition

S4: Yeah it's not because you know somebody needs to write a better report than somebody else for any other reason than at some point they may need to say that they are better than them.

The notion of competition within the service was a theme that some senior EPs mentioned, and there were some contradictory views about competition within the service, where some participants felt it was a significant issue, whilst others had not felt this to be an issue that they had perceived at all.

Sub theme 3: Threat of redundancy

The Senior EPs in FGB discussed the threat of redundancy as the main factor that they viewed had provided the impetus towards developing a traded service delivery model in order to secure jobs through achieving a traded income:

S1: I think the initial thing that we're doing out there is the threat to the service, I think that's critical.

S2: I think almost it's like that should be a watermark underneath everything.

S1: We developed a model [because] we felt there were risks for people being made redundant

S2: Well there still are, aren't they, there still are

S1: But initially that was something very new to us...that was something that was a huge threat... the security had been taken away and we were given the opportunity to do something about the threat of redundancies

Some participants in FGA highlighted their personal worries about the possibility of losing their jobs at the end of the financial year:

P4: When it came to April kind of time that was pretty stressful I'm not sure so much for us as main grades but possibly that might have been something more for senior EPs

P5: I think a sense of a very personal side was we didn't know if we had a job

The stress raised by the threat of redundancy on the service, in regards to being ranked, was viewed by senior EPs as an on-going issue which could not be avoided within the new model of working:

S4: That's what it comes down to. You're ranked if ever the threat of redundancy arises that's the bottom line... and ranking if ever redundancy arises...because that's what would happen, every single person would be ranked and everybody knows that...That's why you get that I can't be off sick that's what that's about because sickness record comes into it... Because the reality is no one would put their hands up and would they or say you go first.

This extract highlighted participants' increased anxiety which had led to some EPs not taking any sick leave, as there was a growing awareness of the factors that could affect how an individual is potentially ranked if redundancy occurred. The threat of redundancy is a significant theme, mentioned by both groups as a key concern underlying job insecurity.

Sub theme 4: Insecurity of tenure

The insecurity of tenure was viewed as a direct threat to the service at both an organisational level and also in regard to individual jobs. In FGB, participants asserted that the threat to the service had led to the creation of the traded model, thus the traded service delivery model was perceived to have been developed to provide capacity in the model of service delivery to support and sustain jobs:

S1: The threat to the service I think is critical.. that's where it came from

S2: Because the threat to the service is what runs under every single thing

S1: We developed a model because we felt there were risks for people being made redundant

S2: Well there still are...

S1: But initially that was something very new to us, um that was something that was a huge threat... the security has been taken away um and we were given the opportunity to do something about it, where previously there was the threat of redundancies

S4: That what it comes down to.. you're ranked if ever the threat of redundancy arises that's the bottom line.

Senior EPs regarded the insecurity of tenure as an issue that underpinned every element of the traded service delivery model, thus they perceived the threat to the service and job insecurity as the same issue:

S3: I think that the threat to the service we've talked last time about that being a watermark

S2: And if we take that back then to me in terms of insecurity of tenure cause I don't think that's we're going to get back to any sort of stable position I think not in a recognisable way

S2: Threat to... is it to job security or to service security? it's the same thing really isn't it

S1: You've got the both there haven't you that's sort of the systemic and the individual

Job insecurity was a theme that emerged across both groups. Whilst the EPs in FGA focused on the impact of this on their jobs and the possibility of being made redundant at the end of the financial year, Senior EPs in FGB tended to focus on the threat to the service as a problem situation which could potentially affect the future of the service.

4.2.3.2 Theme 2: Not knowing Budgets

Not knowing budgets emerged as a second superordinate theme relating to the traded service delivery model. This theme relates to two sub themes, which were: *Political changes* and the *Level of buy back*, which are explored in the next sections.

Sub theme 1: Political changes

The EPs in FGA referred to the broader political changes which related to budgets being reduced and impacting upon the way in which services are funded. The effect of not knowing the budgets of the EP service, due to the high dependency on the level of buy back, and also schools not knowing how much they can afford to spend at the time of year (February to March) when trading takes place, was viewed to stem from broader changes in Government policy:

P3: It's not only being aware of their [schools'] budgets it's not being aware of ours, there with the situation with your jobs and this year we've been two EPs down ...and we've not been able to replace because we've not been sure of budgets um, So that yeah that probably is quite problematic... I still feel quite strongly that this [the environment] is what underpins most of the problems, it's environmental factors that mean we've lost our control of budgets and information and it's for those reasons that really all of those things have changed.

P4: So there definitely is a change .. you know because they've paid however many hundreds of pounds they need something on paper

This extract shows the problems arising from not knowing budgets and it highlights the shift in thinking about the purpose of writing reports, which were viewed to have a cost attached to them; therefore some EPs viewed the political changes to have implications for the purpose of providing reports to schools.

P2: Some of the school are really pleased with the fact that were contracted and they can buy in as much time as they want to

P4: I've experienced it more in the sense of them [schools]...feeling limited by the fact that they to buy us

The participants in FGA regarded the reduction in schools' budgets to have significant implications on the type of work they now expected from EPs, with EPs reports being viewed as having the dual purpose of providing feedback and strategies, whilst also providing evidence of the EPs' involvement with a pupil. This was viewed as a problem situation stemming from the importance placed on budgets within the traded model, which some EPs perceived placed emphasis on delivering an effective service to schools, with an increased pressure to produce measurable outcomes. This is discussed further within the theme: *Increased work load and pressures*.

Sub theme 2: Level of buy back

In FGB, the level of buy back was viewed to indicate the success of the service in terms of being able to survive within the more financially challenging times. This was also related to the relationship that the EPs had built with the schools that they had worked with, highlighting the value placed on the EP service:

S2: One important factor that's the relationships isn't it, with the staff in the schools, that's been one of strengths in the model isn't it, and the whole being bought back was way beyond our capacity initially because people value the relationships with us we've been able to openly show people that the model is better than what they've had before because it's more transparent

S1: But it's just difficult isn't it because we all know if we don't do it they might not buy us back its just difficult it makes it much more difficult to balance the needs of the school cause that's one school and ...you know that you've got to get out there and deliver and use credits so

S4 But we can't dispel it in a way because in February next year if we don't get the buy back or they cut the budget massively if we dispel that that that would never happen and then it does then actually that's how redundancy interviews work if it's one person out of the whole service it's about the person who's ranked at the bottom um

In FGA, the level of buy back was viewed to be highly dependent on keeping schools happy and onside, regardless of the extent of the work conducted by EPs.

P4: What about something about we do what the schools want because for me that's one of the key um we're run ragged

P3: In order to keep them happy (laughing)

P4: That is true though because that one links into this one

P3: So, we do what the schools want

P5: By running ourselves ragged

P4: To give the schools what they want sometimes collaboratively because we don't always let the schools dictate do they?

P1: In order to achieve happy schools

Within FGA, one EP perceived the level of buy-back, or successful trading to be related to the volume of written work and feedback completed by the EP and provided to schools, which was perceived to have reduced the conversations with staff which had been vital in developing the links with schools prior to trading:

P3: That's why I asked whether we should write down what we actually wanted to be doing so if anyone thinks what I actually want to be doing is writing lots of reports to achieve survival but sometimes I think we've all said in this picture that we feel we've lost the children we feel we are doing more of this we're not speaking to the teachers

4.2.3.3 Theme 3: Increased workload and pressures

Within this superordinate theme, the sub themes of: *Time pressures, Competing demands, Trading opportunity and challenges, Report writing and feedback and Ensuring best practice*, emerged as significant to the problem situations discussed by the participants.

Sub theme 1: Time pressures

Participants in FGA asserted that traded service delivery reduced EPs time for reflection on their practice and the way in which they are working. This was viewed as a significant point of tension within the traded model:

P3: I think because the reason we came into this job is to look after these people and now we feel that we're not able to. When it comes down to it some of the biggest stresses have fallen on us and I think it comes back to we don't take enough time to worry actually on the impact that it's having on us.

It was argued by some EPs in FGA that there was not enough time allocated within the model for writing reports and other office based duties, as a greater proportion of time was perceived to be spent in schools; thus creating an increased tension within EPs:

P3: I think a lot of the rules in the system are some of the difficulties we experience at the moment in terms of the time pressures that are associated with having gone traded

P1: But I think that we also I think could look at what's the problem for us at the moment what the tension is and the tension is actually the amount of work and um lack of time and all really sort of bear down. I think the tension is located very much within us I think outside the work that we do and the interface that we have with schools and the work that we do with children hasn't particularly changed much so that feels ok but we're carrying all of this around.

P2: And I think what's interesting is the only children we've drawn on here are the vulnerable children and I know we've drawn a school and that's meant to signify children but I wonder if that's a little bit symptomatic of the fact that that's because what feels priority to us know is this, it's the report writing and all the other things and like we've said before it's like the focus has been taken off the kids.

In FGB, the senior EPs mentioned the pressure to deliver the service within specific timescales, which were reportedly too narrow for them to manage reports and other administrative activities, alongside their managerial duties:

S2: Yes so some of it is the pressure to deliver within timescales that's quite a strong pressure isn't it

S1: Yes it's huge and I think we or my reflection on that is that new colleagues to the service seem to find that challenging and they immediately feel like it's a pressure

Sub theme 2: Competing demands

The competing demand of managing workloads was a theme mentioned across both groups. The participants in FGA discussed this theme in relation to balancing the statutory duties with traded work:

P3: The fact that we're now delivering the traded work but the statutory work's still there

P5: I know it's competing demands really

The Senior EPs explored this theme in relation to their managerial roles and dealing with crises, whilst also managing traded work. FGB went further to discuss the financial resources that were available for vulnerable children, which they stated that they could tap into if they needed some additional time, in order to relieve some of the pressure within the system:

S1: There are other work pressures and expectations so you're trying to deal with the traded model but for instance we have a lot of supervision to do and sometimes we have management things so then you've got to drop everything what you've booked in as you're trying to do your traded bit has to be lost when you do other things that are more pressing.

Some EPs perceived that the competing demands led to EPs tapping into different pots of money in order to gain a degree of flexibility within their traded work. This view is highlighted in the following extract:

S4: If we're looking at the whole service delivery model we've got the traded service to schools as one pot of money we've got the statutory work from the authority as another amount of time but we've also got the vulnerable children which is essentially traded because we have to bid for it every year from the local authority having the work divided down into those sections a lot of people have found that um more beneficial especially the vulnerable children hours 'cause they feel they don't then have to feel under pressure of having to go to that CAF or can I go for it because actually they can say I've got seventy hours for this year I'm going to use some of that so actually having the trading with schools model has made us look at the other elements in the service delivery and sort of um I don't know

Sub theme 3: Trading opportunity and challenges

Although most of the themes emphasised the problem situations arising within the traded service delivery model, some EPs in FGA also highlighted the potential opportunities which could arise from delivering a traded service. The extract below highlights how one EP suggested that becoming a traded service may be viewed as a problem simply because it is a different way of working, in comparison to how EP services have worked in the past:

P1: Just to be different, in terms of saying that it's the most problematic with the system suggests that because we've gone traded you know it is a problem and we've gone traded because obviously the national dictates. Some people might say actually going traded is the most liberating thing that's happened to the educational psychology service and and is it the most problematic thing in the system? or is it because we're equating the fact that we've gone traded as problematic?

P4: So there's an assumption being made there...

P1: Yeah, it's about whether the other system that we work in is, we've got to work with it, and that means we've got to work within traded but does the environmental factors, the fact that it's expected by government, it's what's legislated now, we've got to go out there and make our own way now in some respects, does that mean it's problematic or just that it's different?

P4: I guess the other way of looking at it is that in whatever system there are actually things that work better and things that don't work better so something's are always going to be more problematic and least problematic in whatever system you're looking at.

Another EP emphasised the possible advantages of trading directly with parents:

P3: On the other hand there's the potential benefits of the fact that we're now able to or are considering are we going to trade with parents that kind of thing so we don't necessarily only have to be clients to the schools so there are some positives to that so it's not only a negative arrow.

However, the overarching challenge perceived within traded service delivery was the concern that trading made EPs feel less powerful in relation to negotiating work as they were not perceived to hold the power and control within the traded service model:

P2: And I think it's about the sources of power isn't it because actually I probably feel slightly less powerful in terms of guiding work and saying I could really do with going in to see this particular child because we're very stuck to the model aren't we? We start off with the consultation and if you sort of get what you need from the consultation you don't move on to go and see the child so actually your then removed from that child so the traded model that we've followed has removed us from the children I feel, whereas with the vulnerable children we have our vulnerable pot of money now so actually the children that I pick up and I think actually I could really do with doing some work with them because I can see how vulnerable they are and you go and say can I dip into the pot of vulnerable children money

Sub theme 4: Report writing and feedback

Participants in FGA contrasted the differences between working in the traded model with how they worked previously, within a time allocation model. Interestingly, they mentioned a sense of being rushed to complete the work that they needed to do within the traded model, whereas in the past there was a perception that there had been greater opportunities for providing verbal feedback to staff and the emphasis had not been focused on written reports as it is in the present service delivery model:

P3: Previously we didn't have a report to submit at all did we? We went in we did our observations and generally at the end of your observation you would have a chat with the class teacher and the TA because they were there... Now you're going to go in do your observation and rush out and think I've still got to do some one to one work, I've got to get back [to the office] because I've got three hours to write up a case formulation

P4: So there is a change ... because they've paid however many hundreds of pounds they need something on paper

P3: And that is a lot of how we're judged isn't it?

Although, some participants stated that the workload had increased, some felt that their role had not changed; rather the emphasis of the work had shifted towards stressing the importance of completing written reports:

P3: I don't think that the job we do is different I think the emphasis is on very different things the emphasis used to be I think on relationships that we had with schools on the time that we were spending there, the conversations that we had, whereas now I think there is a lot of paperwork and a lot less time for conversations.

However, in FGB, one senior EP suggested that the traded model had been misinterpreted by colleagues which she felt may have increased the tension on EPs in regards to the expectations for report writing:

S4: We've got this little model that's got all these credits down here OK and there's a fifty-fifty [referring to focus group B rich picture] but what we're actually now thinking is that fifty per cent report writing but actually it's not ... it's for everything, it's for travel, it's for phone calls, it's for emails but we've all forgotten that during when we were developing [the model] it was for everything else that needed doing... I think that's a massive tension in the office now as everybody feels here that everybody's writing lengthy four hour reports when actually unless you've got time to fit all those things in where's that time coming from?

EPs in both groups asserted that the goals and pressures that related to turnaround time for completing written reports were all self-imposed by the EPs, within the service, in order to develop a service delivery model based on providing the highest quality of service, that schools would view as effective and efficient:

S1: The rules we have made up, crafted the rules ourselves we have imposed rules on ourselves to some extent that has also put tremendous pressure on us because we've set ourselves turnaround times...it's perceived tension isn't it, rather than actual ...you feel other people getting to prove they've got two more FU's to do, FU's meaning follow up reports...

The importance given to written reports was stressed by EPs in FGA, in relation to reports being viewed as the evidence used to ascertain the quality of the service provided. EPs discussed the use of reports as a means for transferring psychological thinking about a child's needs which could be shared with schools:

P1: But the writing reports or the case formulations is about transferring our thoughts and understanding of the situation and sharing it with some others so...

P3: So when we're thinking about the 'Q' the Q is not just about how you transform what you see

P1: Yeah we're not just writing the notes and then handing the notes over are we? We do some thinking, we try to put it in some order we try to out some kind of story around

P5: Yeah cause it's the do's that are written because we do that in consultation

P1: There are different methods of writing

Sub theme 5: Ensuring best practice

Both focus groups stated that the increased pressures were imposed by the EP service, in order to deliver an effective service that would provide value for money.

S2: I think that yes the rules and we have made up, crafted the rules ourselves we have imposed rules on ourselves to some extent that has also put tremendous pressure on us because we've set ourselves turn-around times.

S4: I think there are rules across the whole service now for every part of the work

S1: We have put more stringent rules on ourselves than we ever had

S4: Absolutely.

Within this notion of delivering an effective service, participants also mentioned a greater emphasis on accountability in order to ensure best practice in all areas of their work:

S1: It has made life very difficult just because we are all conscious of the need to work to the best of our possible ability at the moment so actually in a lot of senses the models and rules that we've put into the system are actually making us work harder to deliver we've made ourselves more accountable than we've ever been before.

The pressures placed upon the EP service were perceived to have increased as the traded model of service delivery had been developed in order to take into consideration what would be deemed as best practice:

S1: We just decided what would be good to offer them [schools] well what they would be impressed by in terms of buying back in we didn't have it said to us that we needed us brought back in two weeks or four weeks

S4... in terms of feedback from schools before we started looking at a model it was well what would you buy in that's where we started from wasn't it with the surveys what would you buy if and when we trade that was sort of the starting point

S2: But in a sense it was growing from what we deemed to be good practice

S4: Yes good practice as psychologists

The notion of best practice was also balanced with the importance of keeping schools onside, in order to ensure, as far as possible, that schools would continue to buy into the service at the start of the next financial year:

S1: See the thing that I would do here is to provide the best possible service I can I mean that's a slightly different thing too

S3: So if we all agreed that we're all trying to keep the schools happy

S2: And to keep them onside there to meet their demands and trying to deliver the best service that you can

S1: So we don't always achieve this but we'll try to respond to telephone calls promptly and complete reports on time I think I'm speaking personally from my perspective only obviously I think you try to individualise the service that you give to the school more finely than in the past. I think you're always aware of this factor that the school is paying for you umm yeah you're always aware of that factor therefore you just umm that colours the way you behave towards the school

Senior EPs in FGB suggested that they individualised the service based on the schools' needs in order to provide a more effective service that would keep schools satisfied:

S2: I think we always were quite child centred and school centred before but then it's always at the back of your mind ...I think you tend to individualise the type of support you give according to the personalities in play in the school where their positioned

S3: And I suppose in some areas that does create some tensions as well doesn't it ...it makes it more difficult to stick to your time and financial commit, if a TA is acting as SENCo because the SENCo's off with stress and she should really be panicking about how to fill in a request for statutory assessment um so I spend time with her but I haven't charged school for it

However, one EP in FGB stated that EPs needed to retain a sense of being a 'critical friend' to schools and this needed to be balanced with maintaining the relationships with schools and keeping them happy:

S3: Well I think if we're if we use the sort of term you know respecting schools and being sort of critical friends then I'm not sure how critical we feel we can be if we're actually trying to umm keep schools on board I'm just thinking we are we are trying to keep schools happy

Delivering a service that is effective and adheres to best practice guideline for the EPs is perceived to be counterbalanced by the need to ensure schools are satisfied by the service received to secure future trading. These issues raise particular difficulties for EPs within the service and highlight the need to address schools' needs whilst retaining an ethical position and delivering an effective service.

4.3 Stage 3: Relevant Systems operating within problem situations

In this stage of SSM participants moved from thinking about the problem situations in the real world, regarding traded service delivery, to systems thinking where short descriptions were created of systems at work within the real world. These descriptions are referred to as '*root definitions*' of the relevant systems. The SSM techniques of the PQR formula and the CATWOE analysis were used to create these definitions of the relevant systems. The discussion and development of these root definitions operating within problem situations are presented here through the PQR

formula, CATWOE analysis and the thematic analysis of the key themes emerging from the group discussions.

4.3.1 PQR formula

The PQR formula was used as a process for clarifying the main purpose and activities within the traded service delivery model. This formula was used within the focus groups to create a definition of the system (Checkland and Poulter, 2006, p.39) in order to describe: *What the system does (P), how (Q), and why (R)*, which leads to deeper examination of the problem situation related to this definition. This formula suggests that *'a system can be defined as one that does P, by Q in order to achieve R.'*

FGA developed a definition of the traded service delivery model as a system that: *'Applies psychology, by writing reports, in order to achieve better outcomes for children'*. This definition indicated the significance of report writing for this group within the traded model, which was perceived to emphasise the heightened sense of EPs' accountability in providing a traded service to schools.

FGB developed a definition based on the increased need to respond appropriately to schools' needs, thus they suggested that the system focused on: *'Trying to keep*

schools happy / onside, by responding promptly to their perceived needs, in order to meet the needs of the children'. Both definitions described meeting childrens' needs as the ultimate purpose of the activities undertaken within the system. However, this definition emphasised the need to retain the relationship and confidence of schools in order to provide what would be perceived as an effective service.

4.3.2 CATWOE Analysis

During the creation of the Rich Pictures (see Figures 5 and 6), both groups were asked to discuss the six elements that comprise the CATWOE analysis. This analysis is described by Checkland and Scholes (1990. p.35) as a technique for enabling the core elements of a system to be expressed. The dominant CATWOE responses for FGA and FGB are presented in Table 11 below:

Table 11.

CATWOE elements	FGA responses	FGB responses
C: The Customers or problem owners	Other agencies, schools, parents children, EPs	Children and meeting their needs
A: The Actors or problem-solvers	EPs – it is moving away from collaborative working with schools	EPs working with schools
T: The Transformation process (purpose of the system)	Writing reports (reality) success for children (ideal)	Trying to keep job security
W: The Worldview from which system is perceived	Professional and personal view	Personal and Professional
O: The Owners - who can abolish the system	Schools have the power	Schools can dictate EPs work
E: Environmental constraints on the system	Local authority and budgets	Government and political changes – Market forces

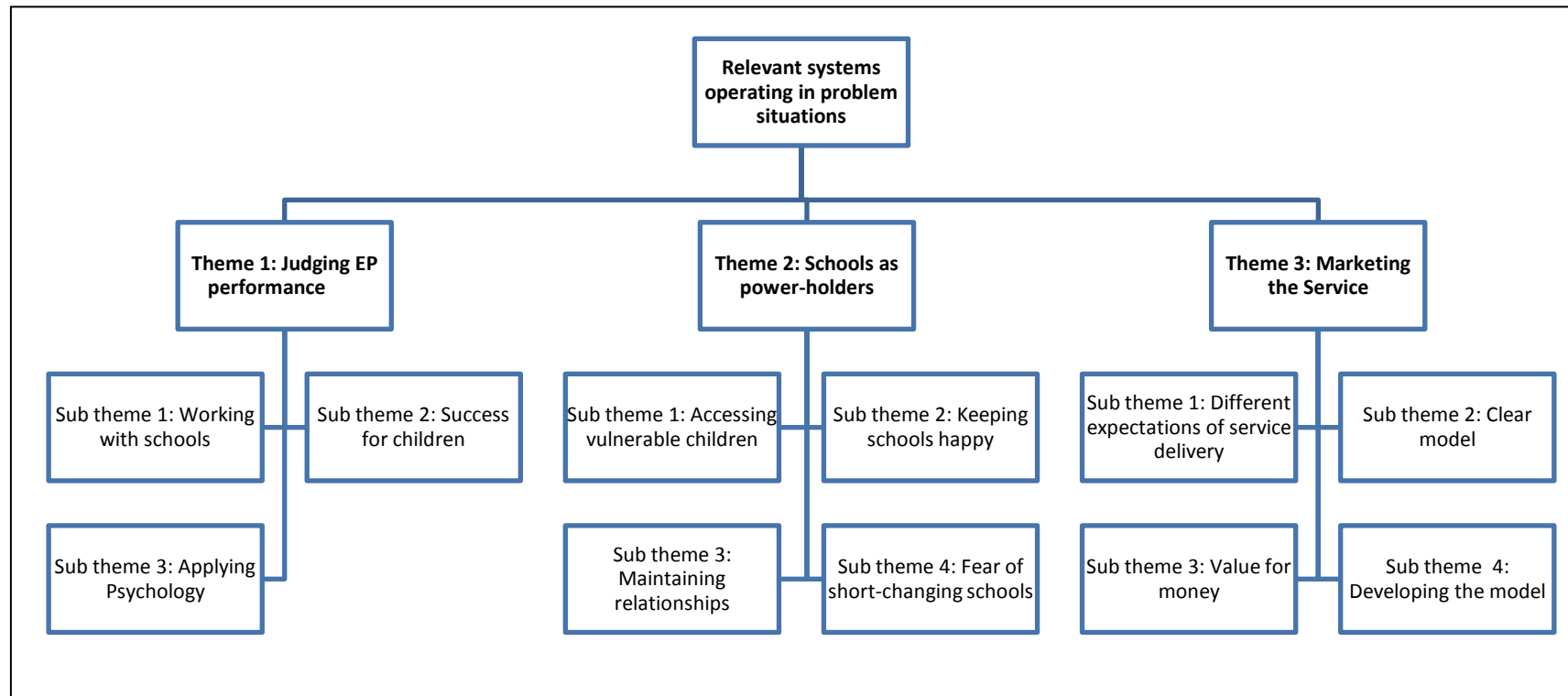
CATWOE analysis for both focus groups

The CATWOE analysis presented in Table 11 is one interpretation created by each group based on their perceptions of the traded service delivery model at that specific point in time. This analysis highlighted the similarities between both groups' thinking, with the main difference relating to the purpose of the system which maingrade EPs viewed as relating to their work with schools, whereas Senior EPs regarded the importance of maintaining jobs as central to the purpose of trading.

4.3.3 Key Themes

The superordinate themes emerging in relation to the relevant systems operating within the problem situations were viewed as: *Judging EP performance*, *Schools as power-holders* and *Marketing the service*. The following sections present the superordinate themes with reference to the sub themes that they are comprised of and Figure 9, below presents a thematic map as an overview of the emerging themes.

Figure 9.



Thematic map 2: Themes relating to the relevant systems operating in the problem situations

4.3.3.1 Theme 1: Judging EP Performance

Judging EP performance was a theme that was viewed to underpin many of the key systems at work within the traded service delivery model, in regards to affecting practice and also how others perceived the EP service. This superordinate theme is examined here in regards to its sub themes: *Working with schools*, *Success for children* and *Applying psychology*.

Sub theme 1: Working with schools

Working collaboratively with schools to improve how EP performance is judged was perceived to be a significant issue for both groups and was discussed in terms of the relationships with schools, which in the past would have enabled EPs to challenge schools alongside working with them:

P1: And then the challenge, how far do you challenge um a situation

P3: Because that will affect how you're potentially judged if you're not going to go back the year after it might actually 'cause you haven't done a good job it's because you haven't agreed with...

S1: It has made life very difficult just because we are all conscious of the need to the best of our possible ability at the moment so actually in a lot of senses the models and rules that we've put into the system are actually making us work harder to deliver we've made ourselves more accountable than we've ever been before

S2: Yeah and that comes into how your performance is judged

There was perceived to be an increased feeling that EPs had become more conscious of being judged by schools, which had led to a greater emphasis on accountable and transparent practice:

P4: I think so how EP performance is judged

P3: I don't know if I see that as a huge problem how we're now judged but it definitely has changed a lot

P1: you think how EPs performance is judged I think that is a big issue

P2: Yeah it's all about accountability now, isn't it?

P1: Accountability and I don't know about you but I feel a little bit more invented to people, so how they feel about me if they like the clothes that I wear you know do I speak the right... I feel a little less in control

In order to ensure EPs are judged in a positive light, some EPs in FGA mentioned the importance of supporting schools with implementing recommended strategies and providing feedback to schools regarding reports. These activities stressed the importance of improving the service delivered:

P5: I think for me it's about supporting the implementation but that links in cause if you think about reports and we just do quite broad recommendations it is quite hard then for schools to implement them Whereas with the CAP it is so specific with the strategies you're giving and its actually written as a plan so it's quite easy for us to help them follow those strategies as much it is for them to follow the strategies on their own and monitor and review them

P2: For me it's definitely ...how do we share that [reports] because that in a way how you share it does support the implementation... and it's about that sort of personal touch that I feel we've lost cause we've got overwhelmed with the with the whole thing.

FGA also suggested that their performance was judged on the basis of whether schools perceived that the service had met their needs, thus increasing the emphasis on agreeing with and following what schools wanted, rather than doing what EPs felt they should, which could lead to possible ethical tensions:

P3: Now they're [schools] directly paying for it there's a greater pressure to do what they want not necessarily what you think is the best course of action and then you're judged on that

P1: Yeah and then .. how far do you challenge um a situation

P3: Because that will affect how you're potentially judged if you're not going to go back the year after it might actually 'cause you haven't done a good job it's because you haven't agreed with...

Sub theme 2: Success for children

This sub theme highlighted the importance of positive outcomes for children in terms of how EPs are judged:

P3: I would say the important output is the benefits for children is the success we have with them but actually at the moment I would say that [case formulations, consultations etc.] is the output more often that it is success for the children I'm sorry to say that at the moment we are being judged on that rather than outcomes for children.

Success for children was viewed as an important guiding principle for EPs, but was seen as increasingly challenging due to other pressures within the system. Therefore FGA referred to reflecting the child's voice accurately within reports as a 'conceptual activity' which they did not feel consistently able to achieve in reality:

P3: So maybe it's not about the child's view

P1: Reflecting the child?

P3: The child's needs....

P3: So what about, writing the report accurately reflecting the child's needs

P2: Oh, yes its conceptual (Laughter)

Sub theme 3: Applying psychology

This theme emerged from EPs' perceptions that applying psychology explicitly within reports would enable schools to clearly see the EPs' thinking and allow their input to supporting children to be more transparent:

P2: By actually writing the case formulation it's actually where I do more psychology in order to achieve better outcomes for children. I do a lot of thinking around my case formulations to school SENCO or teacher.

P3: I do still get the opportunity to apply psychology as I would like to by working in the old way... I mean for me it's working without the reports that makes the difference for me, by not being constrained by report writing.

Some participants in FGB also viewed the application of psychology as an important aspect of their work. It was asserted that applying psychology explicitly in the activities undertaken in schools could help to increase the breadth of activities that EPs could undertake, such as therapeutic work.

S2: There isn't a defined limit to what we can do in the system well actually... what we can do is more broader more psychological it's more a field of applied psychologists because of the rules of the system we've got now than I did before for example you know I wrote a case formulation for a tricky case where a child's been dealing with a bereavement, some therapeutic intervention is indicated and I can offer that and I feel like it's a good use of my time and something that wouldn't been able to do before

S1: Yeah I did similar with a boy who I did an annual review for and on the back of the annual review lots of issues came up that um about abuse from his stepfather and just yesterday I finished the six separate sessions with him where previously I would have gone in and done the annual review and left it at that so I think that yes the rules and we have made up, crafted the rules ourselves we have imposed rules on ourselves to some extent that has also put tremendous pressure on us.

4.3.3.2 Theme 2: Schools as Power-holders

Schools being viewed as power-holders was a theme that related to four sub themes: *Accessing vulnerable children, Keeping schools happy, Maintaining relationships, and Fear of short changing schools.*

Sub theme 1: Accessing vulnerable children

Within FGA, participants discussed concerns about schools holding the power and control over which children were prioritised and referred to the EP service and it was felt that some vulnerable children may not always be school priorities for referral to the EP service:

P3 I wanted to do was put vulnerable children up in a group somewhere because my one of the big concerns we have is how do we still make sure that we are able to get to those vulnerable children. Some of these things almost present a barrier don't they?

P5 Yeah like a brick wall

P4 Yeah and all the children could be on the other side

S2: The most vulnerable members of the community may have reduced access to the service because if the problem their child is presenting with it doesn't sort of rise to the top of the worry list of the school and SENCO then your less empowered in some senses to be able to move on behalf of those children.

Sub theme 2: Keeping schools happy

During the use of the CATWOE technique, participants within FGA identified schools as the owners of the traded service delivery model, as they perceived that schools had the power to abolish this system. FGB also referred to schools as holding power, during the initial card sort activity where participants were asked to rank the nine areas referred to within the questionnaire.

R: Then we're onto the O for the owners, who has the power to abolish the system?

P5: Well schools have the power if that gets bigger in the picture then this bit all gets a lot smaller doesn't it?

S1: When you think of things like sources of power in my head I would put that here as being problematic in the sense that schools have the power they buy or don't buy

Some participants suggested Schools' perceptions of the traded EP service appeared to be dependent on the size of the schools' budgets, where those with limited budgets were less able to work flexibly with the EP service, due to restricted budgets:

P4: I have to say that I've experienced it more in the sense of them being of the school feeling limited by the fact that they have to buy us

P3: It depends on the size of the budget though because take a school like XXXX they have got a big budget and their budget actually will have increased but won't have gone down significantly but smaller schools who are sort of in the leafier suburbs their budgets have been drastically cut so for them this has been a real issue... So it's a positive but it's also a negative is that the schools now feel that they can choose who they have that's a negative because their they may be choosing particular people and then we have time restrictions that and you know problematic.

In keeping schools happy, EPs in both groups perceived the power held by schools as an increasing challenge in regards to controlling their work and activities:

P2: I probably feel slightly less powerful in terms of guiding work and saying I could really do with going in to see this particular child because we're very stuck to the model aren't we... so the traded model we've followed has removed us from the children I feel, whereas with the vulnerable children we have our vulnerable children's pot of money.

S1: They've continued to buy us I'm just saying that if in our eagerness to please we tied ourselves in knots a little bit and so we're trying to untie or loosen some of those knots.

Sub theme 3: Maintaining relationships

It was asserted in FGA, that many schools were happy with the opportunity to 'buy into' the EP service, as this increased the flexibility and control schools had over the work conducted by EPs within their schools:

P2: I mean some of the schools are really pleased with the fact that we're contracted and they can buy as much time as they want to I mean that's a real positive as far as I am concerned

In order to maintain relationships with schools, EPs in FGB described being more responsive to schools' needs which had meant schools valued the relationship they shared with the EP service:

S4: That's what you were saying earlier in what schools value our relationships with them and then they can trust our opinion and our report and that really hasn't really changed has it.

S2: No and if you think about one of the key developments to the model that we offered this year when we traded again was making explicit access to advice and support from an EP... So it was as if we were making legitimate use of the EP time to just wasn't advice and support which was probably what we gave out and got anyway before but we've formalised that bit more and that seems to have brought a lot of reassurance

S3: I mean one from a personal point of view that I try to do is to try to be and I wouldn't say that I've always done that but now I'm even more conscious of that of trying to be available to the schools, trying to be responsive even more

Sub theme 4: Fear of short changing schools

The Senior EPs in FGB highlighted some concerns about short changing children and schools by not being able to provide the level or quality of service that was provided prior to becoming a traded service, due to the insecurity around jobs and not having enough EPs to meet schools' needs:

S3: I think the reason why we do that or some of us do that is that fear of short changing children we should be serving because although that does mean that there'll be a threat to the service and jobs security I don't think that's what drives everybody we're doing it because we don't want to short change the schools as a service but I wouldn't think that would need to be put down

S4: you've got short-changing children's schools because... a lot of things feed into that don't you think? That actually people are worried because we're saying that if their worried that they're short-changing the service then that 'll be what their measured by in the future

FGB discussed issues surrounding the worries EPs had about providing an effective service, and the above extract indicates the EPs' concerns about these issues which influenced how EPs are judged professionally and also has implications for the level of buy-back.

4.3.3.3 Theme 3: Marketing the service

Marketing the EP service was a theme that represented the shift in EP duties due to the traded element within the service delivery model. This theme consisted of four sub themes: *Different expectations of service delivery*, *Clear model*, *Value for money* and *Developing the model*.

Sub theme 1: Different expectations of service delivery

EPs in FGA regarded the move to marketing the service as having implications on which services could be traded with and the types of partnerships that could or could not be developed due to the restrictions imposed by trading. Trading was viewed by some EPs to close down partnerships with other services; however there was also discussion about opening up the possibility of trading with parents:

P1: Trading with other services so we've got the trading but it closes it down in terms of partnerships because we can't do partnership work as we used to because we've paid for it. So it opens up, closes down um then on the other side we were talking about trading with parents yeah so that's it

P1: Yeah so opens up trading partners but it also closes down partnerships because we can't deal without the traded part

P2: We talked about parenting and we said that it opens up trading at either end one side's parents and one side's other services.

To successfully market the service, FGA suggested that EPs were now expected to act as sales people in order to 'sell the service' and gain an increased buy-back:

P3: I was just wondering we didn't talk about it at the time we talked about roles and you know how we said the role hadn't changed I think the one thing that has changed is that we're suddenly having to be sales people and market ourselves and things like that

P3: I wonder if we could draw our psychology symbol here

P1: Do like a salesman's briefcase with the sign on it

This extract also emphasises that EPs viewed the activity of marketing the service as an additional role as part of their professional practice in order to work effectively and gain an increased buy-back within the traded model of service delivery.

Sub theme 2: Clear model

Within FGB, Senior EPs discussed the need for a clear model in regards to the recruitment of a strong team:

S2: Shall we write strong team that means kind of physically and mentally strong yeah Strong tem

S1: Do we need to have a clear package of umm they have to have a clear conceptualisation of what they can deliver and what they're expected to deliver... just before that do they need to have a clear understanding of the aim of the service?

S2: Yes, is that a training need or a professional development need?

S1: It it it will be for new people coming in but we've done some of the training in understanding and developing the package umm but but its making sure people have a clear vision of what we are delivering

S2: Yeah, have a clear vision of what we are delivering in terms of what we have on offer what we are offering to schools

S1: I think the can is important, what we can deliver

In terms of developing a clear model of service delivery, two Senior EPs stated that the use of the conceptual model technique used within the focus groups helped to create a model that clearly set out what they wanted to achieve and how they could go about doing this:

S2: Yes and this is a two way as well isn't it if you have a quality service you have to maintain that

S1: Yeah and some of the rich picture was made up of a series of individual observations or it just meant everybody was just putting down anything that came up whereas this [conceptual model] was distilling into key core focus wasn't it

S1: This was more higher order thinking

Sub theme 3: Value for money

Marketing the service centred on discussions which highlighted the association between the value for money that the EP service could provide in order to encourage a greater buy-back:

S2 Because we can't meet the needs of the children if the schools don't buy us back in that's where we can only do that by keeping the feeling that we're a valuable service to them and therefore they buy us back in

S1: I think by doing it in that way though we can go in with our heads held high and we can feel that we're offering a value for money service that

EPs perceived providing schools with value for money as equated with the quality of the reports that schools receive. One EP in FGA viewed the Rich Picture as a possible technique which could be incorporated into the reports provided to schools, for implementing strategies:

P1: I think it's quite topical because we aren't a hundred per cent happy with our reports in terms of length and what their delivering in terms of how they look, even if you've got a report that takes an hour to write which is good for us it still needs to look one hundred pounds worth to the person who's receiving it, so there's something about um efficiency, but value and making sure the two of those are put... and this actually might help to get us thinking outside of the A4 portrait wordy type of reports and thinking more creatively about how we can produce something that might be bit quicker might actually trigger that novel aspect in people 'what is this about' 'oh what's that colour' and and actually draw people and use the psychology of drawing people to the paper to get them to read it and then interact with it, you know we drown in paper, what makes our paper more different.

FGA also highlighted the shift in the use of the word 'value' from valuing the relationships built and maintained over time with schools, to the financial connotations of providing 'value for money' through the work EPs complete:

P2: It's interesting when you used the word value when we were thinking about it the value means in terms of the financial aspect which we have to think about because we're traded where are we placing the value now are we thinking about you know are we saying the value is in the report or is the value in that personal conversation you have with the SENCo or is the value in the personal conversations that you're having with the children you know what do schools value. I think value is quite a key word in terms of its financial element , the understanding that financial terms and in terms of what schools value what the children would value and then what you value professionally and I don't think we've got that right

P5: I don't think we know what that is yet either, I don't think we've asked.

Sub theme 4: Developing the model

During the conceptual activity model stage, FGB focused on how to further develop the model of service delivery in order to ensure equity for all schools and EPs and also to demonstrate the capacity within the service:

S2: So would you need a mechanism, within the service to arrange the delivery like like we've got our schools allocation whatever that's called we need a mechanism in the service to deliver a certain amount don't we a certain amount of credits S1: Yes, we did just come up with that model and how we were going to deliver it so I suppose you want the two together but I don't know which comes first really

S2: Is it one of those parallel activities where you've got things happening at the same time

S3: Yeah so arrangement in the service to deliver the model

S2: So arrangement in the service for efficient delivery is that correct for effective delivery

FGB stated that the service delivery model which was currently being marketed to schools had evolved over time and stressed the importance of reviewing and developing the model according to service users' needs:

S1: It was just the clarification about the model or something along those lines the model in which you work

S2: I wouldn't say clarify, but we evolved it didn't we because we tweak it and we review it don't we review the model at regular intervals

Alongside meeting service users' needs, FGB stated that the model also needed to be developed in order to maintain good levels of trading and buy-back in the future:

S1: Well you need the team first don't you you can't go anywhere if you haven't got the team ... because we need to maintain the service

S3: Yeah we have

S2: ... because we're constantly changing and improving it

S1: We also haven't got evaluate

S2: Don't we have arrows going both ways because we do this in order to get feedback

S3: Not necessarily I think it also comes from there Maybe it would be by we can deliver ... and we respond to feedback don't we

S1: ...And do we is there another step or do we stop at we get to reviewing and developing the delivery model and then is there a step beyond that do you think or would that be in an ideal world what might that lead to.

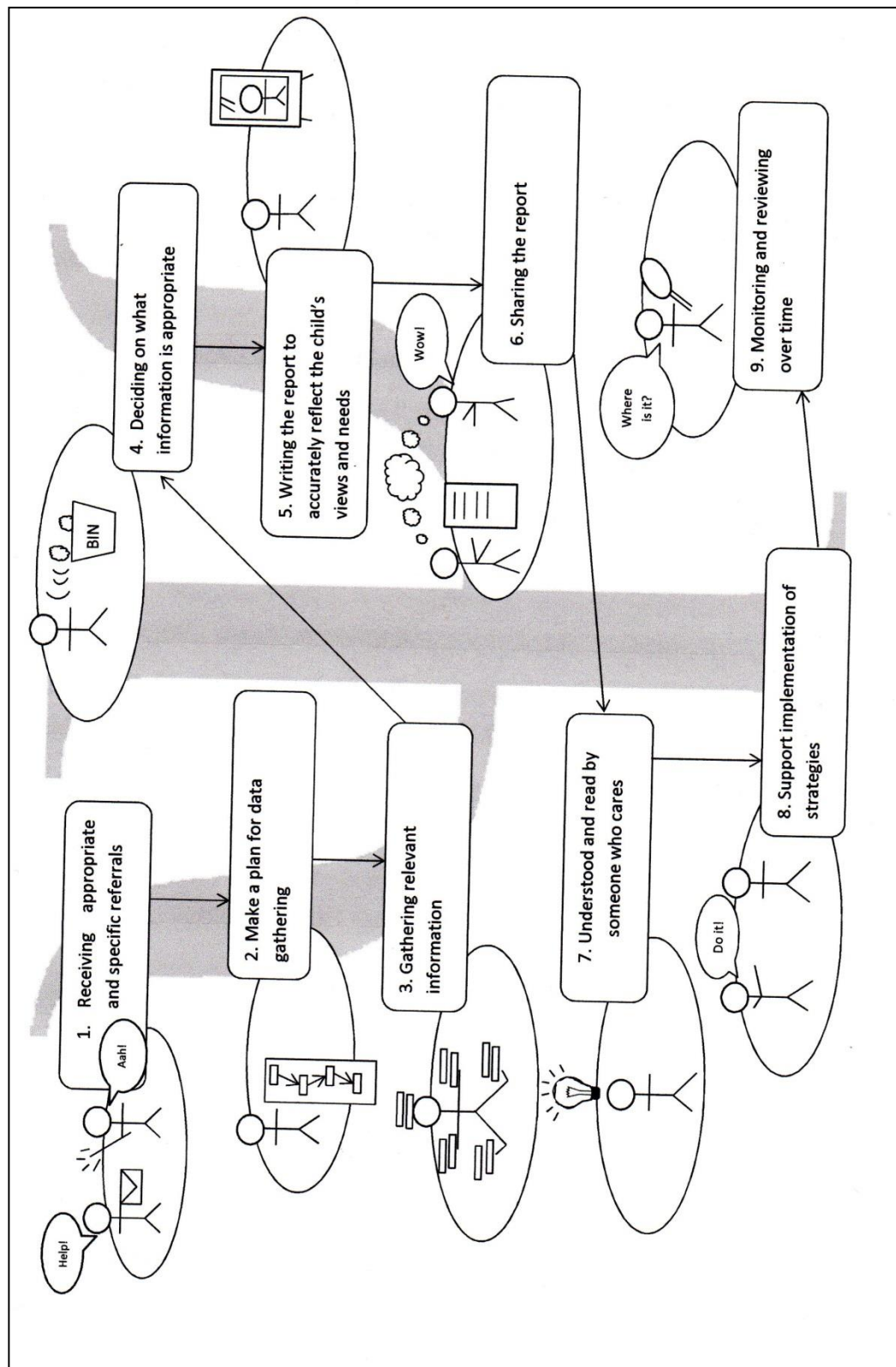
4.4 Stage 4: Activities to Improve Practice

Following the creation of a root definition for relevant systems, a conceptual model was developed. The conceptual activity model refers to the specific set of activities which are logically required in a system that is defined in the root definition. The conceptual activity models were created by both groups, following a discussion around defining the relevant systems that they wanted to focus on as a group.

4.4.1 Conceptual Activity Models

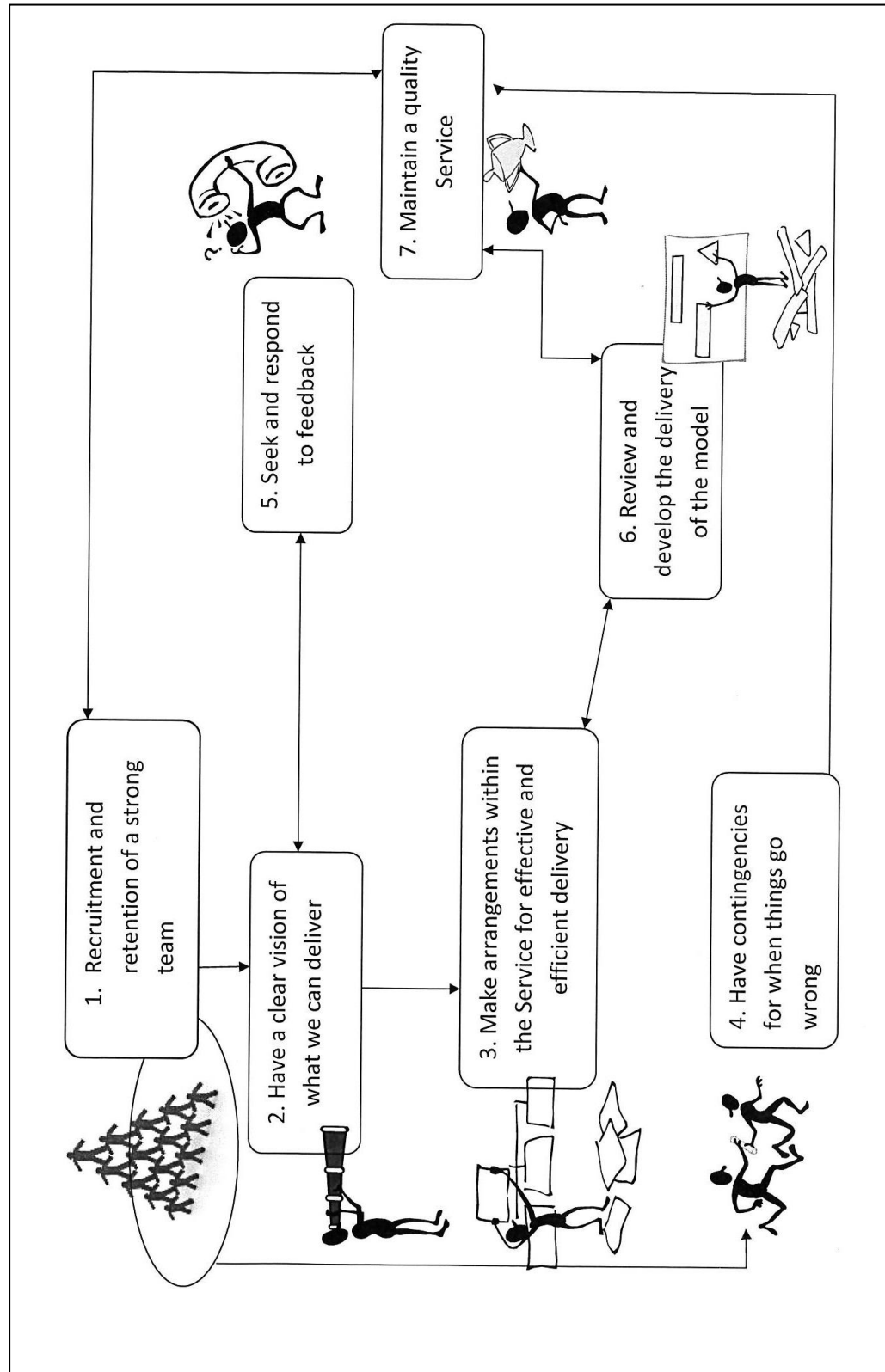
During the second focus group session, following the development of a definition of the system using the PQR formula, both focus groups were asked to construct a conceptual activity model, through initially brainstorming various activities that could be included in the model before refining this further to create the conceptual activity model drawings represented in Figures 7 and 8 (below).

Figure 10.



Conceptual activity model created by focus group A

Figure 11.

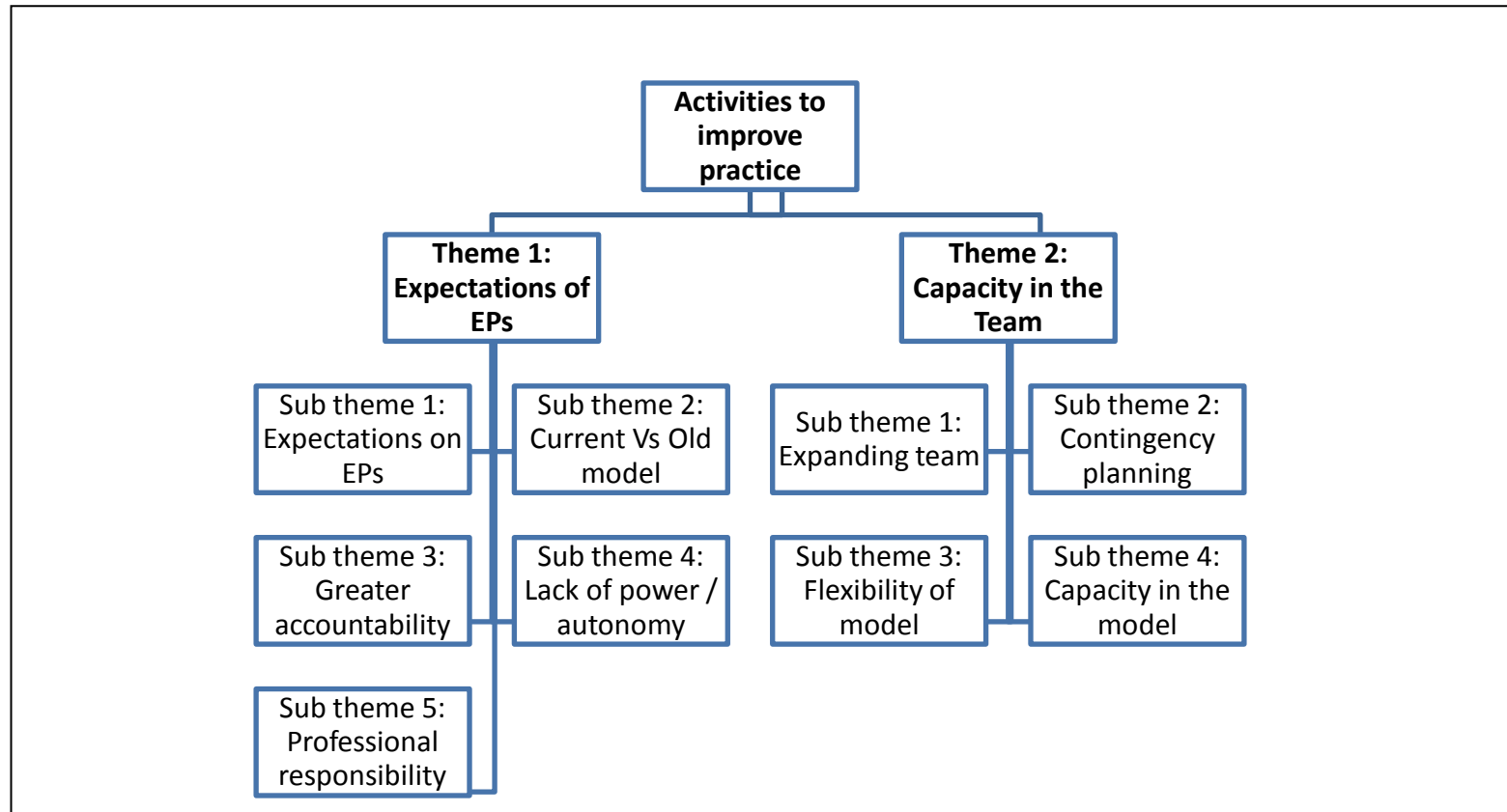


Conceptual activity model created by focus group B

4.4.2 Key Themes

The superordinate themes emerging in relation to the development of the conceptual activity model were: *Expectations of EPs and Capacity in the team*. The following sections present these two superordinate themes in greater detail and with reference to the sub themes that they relate to, and Figure 12, below presents an overview of the themes discussed in the following sections.

Figure 12.



Thematic map 3: Themes relating to the activities to improve practice

4.4.2.1 Expectations of EPs

Within the superordinate theme of Expectations of EPs, five sub themes emerged that were most pertinent: *Expectations on EPs, Current Vs. old model, greater accountability, lack of power/ autonomy and professional responsibility.*

Sub theme 1: Expectations on EPs

The expectations on EPs are perceived to have increased due to the greater breadth of the EP role. In FGA, some participants suggested that the traded model of service delivery had shifted the emphasis of their work to other areas, thus it was perceived that the broadening role also incorporated higher expectations from EPs:

P3: I would just say that we have more pressure because we're expected to do a lot more of each of the roles if that makes sense... I don't think that the job we do is different I think the emphasis is on very different things the emphasis used to be I think on relationships that we had with schools, on the time that we were spending there, the conversations that we had, whereas now I think there is a lot of paperwork and a lot less time for conversations

Within the EP service, FGB suggested that the increased emphasis on the expectations on EPs were mainly due to the self-imposed rules which were used to ensure EP practice was providing the value and the quality expected from schools.

Thus most participants in FGB perceived the pressures related to the expectations on EPs to be imposed from within the service itself, rather than from external forces:

S1: It's interesting that we've already gone completely into the back office of the thing we're not talking about the model in terms of schools at all

S4: But I don't feel there's tension out there it's here

S2: No I think that the tension is in house. I think there's a tension between what the EPs think the expectations of senior management is of them and what senior management think that the expectations from the EPs is and if you're a senior manager and an EP then you're tense within yourself (laughs) genuinely you are because I think there is an expectation and you think oh my god if we've got this model running we can't do it how can we possibly be thinking everybody else does it?

On the other hand, EPs in FGA, perceived that increasingly high expectations were placed on EPs by schools. Some EPs felt that their performance was judged by schools in regards to what they could and should expect from the EP service:

P4: EP performance is linked to expectations because how um what schools expect us to do um will have an impact on whether they feel how we've performed to keep the schools happy.

It was regarded that the model of service delivery was developed in order to provide the best possible service to service users; however it was also viewed that this had led to EPs placing more pressure on themselves:

S4: I think there are rules across the whole service now for every part of the work

S1: We have put more stringent rules on ourselves than we ever had... we just decided what would be good to offer them well what would they be impressed by in terms of buying back in

S4: In terms of feedback from schools before we started looking at a model it was well what would you buy in that's where we started from wasn't it with the surveys what would you buy if and when we trade that was sort of the starting point

S2: But in a sense it was growing out from what we deemed to be good practice

Sub theme 2: Current Vs. previous model

In FGA, some EPs who had worked in the service prior to the shift to trading, discussed the differences between the current and previous way of working:

P3: I don't think that the job we do is different I think the emphasis is on very different things. The emphasis used to be I think on the relationships that we had with schools on the time that we were spending there, the conversations that we had, whereas now I think there is a lot of paper work and a lot less time for conversations

Other participants suggested that some of the expectations placed on the EPs within the previous model of service delivery, had implications for EPs' perceptions of the

expectations on them. This is highlighted in the extract below regarding the shift in expectations regarding EPs report writing.

P4: But do you think that's an experience by people that have worked in this EPS for a longer time?

P3: Probably because this EPS was a non-report writing service... for me that is not the best way to share knowledge, it's not the best way to achieve the outcomes for children because most of those reports... do not get passed to the right people or are never read anyway

Sub theme 3: Greater accountability

EPs across both groups suggested that although the system in which they worked had changed, the EP role was still the same as before trading. Thus, they mentioned the heightened emphasis on accountability as being a necessary part of working in a traded model:

P5: We're still EPs we're still those people we still have that role but it's the system which we're working in that's changed

P1: if you think how EPs' performance is judged I think that is a big issue

P2: Yeah it's all about accountability now, isn't it?

For the Senior EPs, some perceived the level of increased accountability as being closely associated with providing a better quality service:

S1: it has made life very difficult just because we are all conscious of the need to the best of our possible ability at the moment so actually making us work harder to deliver we've made ourselves more accountable then we've ever been before.

The issue of increased accountability overlapped with the issues regarding the pressures of the increased workload, in regards to balancing the need to provide a quality service whilst maintaining accountable practice.

Sub theme 4: Lack of power and autonomy

The expectations on EPs were regarded to relate to changes in the schools' position to now being viewed as power-holders. Some EPs perceived the previous model to have enabled greater autonomy and control over the work that EPs agreed, which was now viewed to be much more limited due to the power being perceived to lie with schools:

P5: Rules in the system, sources of power and Expectations of EPs in the system

P1: I think those three things are really about the change in our place in the system as well and I think in the older model our influence if I can put it like that was quite autonomous and we could go in and negotiate on a level playing field about what children need and who we go involved with now I think the traded model means that we're just on the back foot a little bit.

The EPs in FGA suggested that they felt a lack of power and autonomy in terms of negotiating work with schools. The traded model was regarded to be incompatible

with EPs' perspectives of how they should ideally be working with children, families and schools:

P4: I think the reason why a lot of us are feeling stressed is because this world view that we've drawn out is completely incompatible with our own personal world view our own lives it's certainly incompatible with my view of what I want this world to be like in terms of what we're doing... we don't feel that we have the autonomy to change the set up that actually in a way our service leaders you know our Seniors do have some power over changing aspects of this don't they.

Some participants asserted that the sense of power and control over their work had been reduced by the pressures on the EP service to provide a service which met schools' expectations, rather than how EPs would prefer to work:

P3: In the past I think we had a lot more autonomy when it came to the work that we might do in schools and whereas now there are people paying for it if you like now they're directly paying for it there's a greater pressure to do what they want not necessarily what you think is the best course of action and then you're judged on that

Sub theme 5: Professional responsibility

The expectations placed on EPs to provide a high quality service was regarded by some EPs to emphasise their professional responsibility to support colleagues and also accounting for other EPs activities. This sub theme underlined the need for EPs to maintain the service expected by service users by covering for and supporting those EPs who were absent:

P1: I think one of the things that trading has put on us is that we're now more responsible for each other in some respects because of um if I didn't pull my weight then you've got to do it because we've got to keep schools' happy.

The notion of professional responsibility and being accountable for other EPs practice was an expectation that some participants felt was a new facet of the system in which they were now working. This was perceived to add to the pressures of delivering a service, where the level of work generated from the buy-back exceeded the capacity available within the EP service:

S1: I would say it's more so – trying to keep the schools happy stroke onside we've done that haven't regarding xxxx's [an EPs'] schools whereas before if someone was off or if somebody wasn't able to deliver a service we might have just oh you know look tough but umm we've umm we've tried we've bent over backwards to try and make sure that they were compensated for any losses they suffered

4.4.2.2 Capacity in the team

The capacity in the team and building capacity was a significant theme that emerged from the conceptual activity model process completed with the Senior EPs in FGB, thus the extracts for this predominantly originate from the FGB discussions. This theme gave rise to three sub themes: *Contingency planning, Flexibility of model and Capacity in the model.*

Sub theme 1: Contingency planning

During the creation of the conceptual activity model in FGB, the Senior EPs discussed the importance of contingency planning which they had realised was fundamental to the successful service delivery to service users and also could help to alleviate some of the time pressures felt within the traded model. The notion of contingency planning was perceived to be an activity that had not initially been thought about when the model of traded service delivery had been developed:

S2: I don't think the dawning of the reality that number four [contingency planning] needs to be considered is important I think that's important for staff stress and mental health to know that there is that terrible feeling that oh I can't possibly be ill I can't possibly be at home because I have to deliver all these credits. if we had some kind of safety net that actually is important for our ability to remain a strong and

S1: Yeah I think we have to have we can use it in lots of ways if we've had a school complaint or if any issues arise over anything we are we have we are quick to respond and to recognise what we need now to get to a contingency planning phase that has to be a key bit for the service always ready or a school decides they want a hundred credits next year but what are we going to do about it that contingency planning is is there we'll never be caught on the wrong foot and always ready to react. In an ideal world that would be very good and very nice

During the creation of the conceptual model, some participants within FGB suggested that contingency planning needed to be factored into the model through the recruitment and retention of staff, in order to create a strong team:

S2: you haven't got anyone trying to keep the schools happy and onside if you haven't got a fully recruited fit and healthy well active service people

S3: It's about having the staff

S1: You've got to have staff to invest that's that's the most important resource we've got isn't it to meet the needs of children

R So what's the activity is it the recruitment of staff

S2: I think it's the recruitment and retention of staff

This discussion highlighted to FGB the importance of contingency planning which had not been previously viewed as a an area for concern or further development.

Sub theme 2: Flexibility of the model

Some participants in FGA perceived that successful work could only be achieved by breaking free of the traded service delivery model. This was due to the model being regarded as too prescriptive in terms of how EPs were expected to work and the activities they were required to undertake:

P3: we try to do what we think matters by breaking free of the model

P4: Working flexibly in the model

P3: Um breaking free of the model I think would possibly be more appropriate here um to meet the needs of children

P5: It's like we support the children to vulnerable children don't we by doing things completely not in the model in order to achieve better outcomes

For other EPs who had newly joined the EP service, their views regarding the flexibility in the model contrasted with other participants, as they did not perceive that the model of service delivery was overly rigid:

P3: See I think it's not because I've never worked here without the model so I don't know what I'm comparing it to and I think it's a continuum in the sense that the model's more restrictive but for me it isn't black or white it isn't like I can't kind of do the job that I was doing in another service before because actually for me it is quite similar

The maingrade EPs in FGA argued that the model was not created with service users' needs at the forefront, which they perceived as a short-coming of the model:

P2: Not only are we have we thought about the service users being the people that buy back and not the children and not necessarily the teachers you buy back we've also narrowed it even further I think and we've thought about from the point of view of the service users and what they need to get something else... We've not even been thinking about I don't think in terms of the service users using it for the children we've thought about it in terms of they need a paper trail we need this because we need that to go onto the next you know to clear the next hurdle

Other EPs wanted the model to become more flexible so that reports would not need to be the sole outcome of EPs' involvement:

P1: And I think that's and my feeling you know whatever goes on with it that the freeing up of the statutory route I'm it's my prayer, that it really does help to open up that flexibility and really it's not about me ticking boxes cause then that's getting them to do the actual implementation of the strategies and get down to business with that and having that kind of heavy well you're just here to tick the boxes

P2: It depends on the context doesn't it because at the moment in some respects it's better not to implement the strategies properly and for it not to be helpful because then it is ticking a box to move onto something else

Senior EPs in FGB suggested that the lack of flexibility in the model was due to the service delivery model being created without planning for contingencies or taking account of sickness or crises into consideration:

S2: I think the big problem in the expectation arena is that we set a model up that assumes everybody's working all the time their never sick nobody's ever off on a long term period of sickness and that there are no perceived circumstances that mean that you know team managers or anybody is caught up doing other things you know like critical incidents and yet we still expect of ourselves and each other that if push comes to shove and a critical incident comes that we will jump and we do jump

Sub theme 3: Capacity in the model

The importance of maintaining capacity in the team was argued by FGB to be intrinsically linked with developing the model to incorporate flexibility:

S1: Well we were just saying that it's like chicken and egg you can't make arrangements for an effective service if you haven't got your model but you can't have the model without effective working from the position we're at now

S2: I just thought of one to have contingencies when things go wrong... So contingencies for when things go wrong like for instance when we have our associates can be called on if somebody's away or if extra work is sent

S1: Its maintaining capacity isn't it?

Capacity within the team was discussed as an issue which impacted on the ability of the EPs to effectively deliver the service, and one senior EP suggested that currently there was no capacity in the model:

S2: I think the big problem in the expectation arena is that we set up a model that assumes everybody's working all the time. They're never sick. Nobody is never off on a long term period of sickness and that there are no perceived circumstances that mean that you know team managers or anybody is caught up doing other things...like critical incidents and yet we still expect of ourselves and each other that if push comes to shove and a critical incident comes that we will jump and we do jump.

S4: And again that's the word isn't it capacity there's absolutely zero capacity in the service model.

S1: I think that's important for staff stress and mental health to know that there is that terrible feeling that oh I can't possibly be ill I can't possibly be at home because I have to deliver all these credits. If we had some kind of safety net that actually is important for our ability to remain strong

4.5 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has presented the results from the SSM techniques used, and the thematic analysis, in order to highlight the overarching themes relating to EPs' perceptions of the traded service delivery model. These broad themes encompass a range of key issues and concerns raised by the participants in relation to traded

service delivery. Chapter 5 utilises the research questions as a framework for viewing the links between the themes emerging from this study and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, in order to consider how the findings of this study could potentially contribute to the expansion of knowledge regarding EP service delivery and the impact of trading.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter considers the results presented in Chapter Four. The results are discussed in relation to the research questions and the literature reviewed in Chapter two in order to examine the contribution this study makes in regards to understanding the implications of EPs working within a traded service delivery model.

The research questions that this study aimed to address were:

Research Question 1: What do EPs perceive as problem situations arising from the traded service delivery model?

Research Question 2: What relevant systems are perceived to be operating within the problem situations?

Research Question 3: What activities could help address the problem situations to help improve practice?

5.2 Research Question 1: What do EPs perceive as problem situations arising from the traded service delivery model?

This question focused on developing an in-depth understanding of the problem situations perceived to arise from working within the traded service delivery model. Checkland and Poulter (2006) describe problem situations as: *‘a situation about which we have the feeling that “something needs to be done about this”’* (p.3). In this study the problem situations were associated to the themes elicited through the discussion relating to the Rich Pictures (Figures 5 and 6). EPs’ perceptions of the problem situations predominantly related to three superordinate themes: *Job Insecurity, Not knowing budgets, and Increased workload and pressures.*

EPs stated that the risk of redundancies and the increased risks to long-term job security had been a significant driving force behind the development of the traded service delivery model, within this EP service, with its initial purpose being to enable EPs to retain their jobs by creating a traded income. Ernst and Hiebert (2002) argue that:

‘...one of the best ways to ensure organizational survival is to target services at the main sources of need and use accountability information to demonstrate the effectiveness of those services.’

(Ernst and Hiebert, 2002, p.79)

The notion of organisational survival was perceived by participants in both focus groups as central to the need to shift to a model of trading. However, rather than

alleviate concerns about job insecurity, the traded service delivery model is perceived to have created increased tensions about the future of the service, and the way in which the EPs are expected to work, which has led to some EPs regarding the end of the financial year as a time of anxiety for the whole organisation as well as at the individual level.

Fallon et al., (2010) argue that the development of trading and commissioning services can place EPs in direct competition with one another. This concern was voiced within focus group A, during the creation of the Rich Picture, where EPs mentioned their worries about other providers and private EPs who Schools could show a preference for buying into as opposed to trading with the EP service. It was perceived that the emphasis of EP activities was increasingly being placed on who can provide the most cost-effective service that is also value-for-money.

Schools not knowing their budgets, at the point in time when the service level agreement meetings were conducted with the EP service, meant that schools were viewed by participants to be initially hesitant to buy in significant amounts of EP time. This theme of *not knowing budgets* also related to EPs' feeling anxious about the annual cycle of trading with schools and not knowing how the EP service's budget would fare at the end of the financial year. In both focus groups, EPs stated concerns about their performance being judged on the basis of the buy-back from their allocated schools, which increased the anxiety and pressure to ensure schools perceived the EP as a value-for-money resource.

Acklaw (1990) highlights the importance of researching customers' needs and shaping the service provided to effectively meet their needs. This emphasises the shift in the vocabulary used when working within a traded model, where economic effectiveness and budget availability is central to deciding the level of the EP service's involvement in supporting schools, children and families. This has required a shift in thinking when defining the individuals and organisations that EPs work with, who are referred to as the 'customers' of the EP service.

This view is congruent with a business-oriented approach to service delivery, but within this study, EPs viewed this approach to sit uneasily with the core purpose of their professional role which was viewed as one focused on supporting schools to work in the best interests of childrens' needs:

'I think because the reason we came into this job is to look after these people [children, young people and families] and now we feel that we're not able to. When it comes down to it some of the biggest stresses have fallen upon us and I think it comes back to we don't take enough time to worry actually on the impact that it's having on us.'

(P3, focus group A)

Time pressures emerged as a sub-theme within the superordinate theme: *Increased workload and pressures*, which was related to the impact of the time allocated for report writing and managing other traded activities, alongside statutory work. EPs perceived the balance of time allocated for traded and statutory activities to

increasingly reduce the time allotted for writing up reports and other administrative tasks, such as telephone calls and checking emails. Senior EPs in focus group B suggested that managerial duties such as supervision and management meetings were not accounted for within the traded time allocation, which was perceived to add stress to these participants.

In regards to time allocation service delivery models, Imich (1999) suggests that time allocation can reduce flexibility within the service and can lead to EPs developing a sense of a lack of autonomy and control over their work, which is viewed to cause an inherent dissatisfaction within their practice. Although time allocation is used to manage the various demands on EPs' time, within the literature on service delivery, it is cited as a barrier to effective working practices and is often reported to lead to school staff becoming frustrated with the limited time EPs have in schools (Farrell, et al., 2006; Fallon, et al., 2010).

The issues around managing time for traded and other duties highlighted the task of developing the service delivery model, whilst taking account of the variety of activities that EPs are able to undertake. Focus group B felt that working within the traded service delivery model provided better insight into judging the factors which needed to be considered for further developing and refining the model.

The notion of traded service delivery placing a heightened emphasis on providing value-for-money meant that EPs' perceived that schools wanted to see them more often, which was significantly reducing the amount of time for report writing; however writing reports was perceived to be a more central activity for EPs in this model as participants felt that this provided evidence of their involvement and their effectiveness as practitioners. Report writing was also felt to have implications for the level of trading with schools in the future; hence this was perceived to be intrinsically linked with satisfying schools' needs.

With the increased emphasis on providing evidence for EP involvement and their activities, the theme *increased workload and pressures* underlined another key implication of working within the traded service delivery model. Focus group B suggested that there was an implicit sense of competition arising from within the service in order to show who works the hardest (see Rich Picture, Figure 6). This competition was perceived to be closely associated with the concerns about redundancies and demonstrating value for money.

Many writers have suggested that EP services need to implement robust evaluative strategies which appraise individual EPs' work and ensure that the service provided is consistent, of a high quality and accountable (Pearson, 1989; Gersch et al., 1990; Leadbetter, 2000). Trading with schools further stresses the importance of ensuring a consistent, transparent service which means that schools have the same high levels of expectations regardless of who their EP is.

The themes of *Job insecurity* and *Not knowing budgets* are issues that have, over the past three decades, been closely linked to the problems around defining the professional role of EPs, which has been marred by ambiguity and role conflict since the reconstruction movement of the late 1970s (Gillham, 1978). Mackay, writing over ten years ago stated:

‘Educational Psychology is a service that one party (children, parents) receive (often whether they want it or not), usually requested for them by a second party (teachers or head teachers), but funded by a third party (educational authorities) using funds that are not their own...’

(Mackay, 2002, p.246)

The ambiguous and often fragmented nature of the EP role, and the service users with whom they work, has often led to concerns being discussed in the literature about the future of the profession and where funding will come from in order to sustain the services provided by EPs (DFEE, 2000). Thus, this shift to trading does not necessarily highlight new concerns; however the participants in this study perceived that their role had to incorporate a ‘sales person’ function which stressed the direct link between their income and services provided to service users. Therefore, notions such as: value for money, ethical trading and best practice now appear to be at the forefront of professional EP practice, within this service, which has had implications for the level of work and pressures experienced by professionals at all levels of the organisation.

5.3 Research Question 2: What relevant systems are perceived to be operating within the problem situations?

Relevant systems are referred to as: *'the interactions between parts of a whole, such as an organisation'* (Checkland and Poulter, 2006, p.4). This study related the systems defined by each focus group, using the PQR formula, to the traded service delivery model, in order to identify the worldview which made these systems relevant. This research question related to the SSM activities which enabled the creation of a definition of a system operating within an aspect of the problem-situation. The superordinate themes emerging from the thematic analysis that related to this research question related to: *Judging EP performance, Schools as power-holders and Marketing the service.*

Judging EP performance emerged as a significant theme relating to EPs' perceptions of how each other's work could impact upon schools' views of the EP services' performance. Thus, a negative view of one EPs' work was perceived to potentially threaten how other EPs were also perceived. Wolfendale, et al.,(1992) highlighted this view, regarding the importance of a consistent approach to service delivery, which was underpinned by the introduction of service level agreements (SLAs) as a framework for clarifying EPs' role and duties and what schools could expect from the EP service, regardless of which EP undertook the work. But Pearson, (1989) suggests that there is an expectation on public services to provide transparent and accountable services which are regularly appraised and evaluated at an individual

level, as well as at the level of the organisation, to ensure the effectiveness of the service.

Focus group B suggested that EP performance was judged on the extent to which schools were kept happy, and moreover 'onside', in order to increase the chances that they would continue to buy-into the service in future. This was illustrated in their definition of the system developed using the PQR formula, which stated that the traded service delivery model was:

'Trying to keep schools happy / onside, by responding promptly to their perceived needs, in order to meet the needs of the children'.

Participants from both focus groups suggested the importance of keeping schools happy and satisfied with the service provided by EPs, as schools were now perceived to be more in control of the type of service and support that they wanted from EPs. Thus, the theme of *Schools as power-holders* underpinned the EPs' perceptions of who they viewed was currently in control of the work that they undertook.

As the power-holders, schools are perceived to be in a stronger position to request different types of work, or suggest that EPs focus on individual casework, which has been an aspect of the EP role that the profession has attempted to move away from since the reconstruction movement in the late 1970s (Gillham, 1978) in order to broaden the perceptions of what the EP profession could offer. In contrast, however,

Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) argue that individual casework is an activity that schools value, thus emphasising that it should be retained as a key element of the EP's professional role.

Wagner (2000) and Farrell (2010) assert that EPs should develop the breadth of their role and actively reflect on other ways of delivering the service as opposed to utilising the 'traditional' role as a caseworker, which is argued to limit EPs' autonomy and their breadth of skills. Participants in this study suggested that they were able to broaden the extent of their activities in schools due to the traded service delivery model, which they found useful in order to 'sell' the service. On the other hand, the discussions within the focus groups also highlighted the sense of increased power and control schools now had due to trading which they felt had implications for the type of work they wanted to buy from EP services.

The EPs in this study perceived the broadening of their role would help when selling the service, hence *marketing the service* was another superordinate theme which was viewed to underpin the systems at work within the traded service delivery model. Some participants within focus group A mentioned that the breadth of work they undertook had led to the development of greater bureaucracy, as reports were perceived to have become an implicit mechanism for evidencing EPs' work, both for the purpose of feedback and evaluating the work completed by EPs.

Focus group A's definition of a relevant system related to the unique selling point that the EPs had developed in order to survive as a service. For this group of EPs this was related to the application of psychology when writing reports which they viewed as the distinct contribution that the EP service was able to use in order to 'market' the service to schools. Ashton and Roberts (2006) discuss the notion of the distinct contribution made by EPs and question whether EPs should provide the activities that are valued by schools, such as individually-focused work, or whether EPs should move to promote alternative ways of working (Ashton and Roberts, 2006, p.120). The EPs in this study emphasised the importance of keeping schools happy, which is a view consistent with the former suggestion made by Ashton and Roberts (2006) indicating that providing a service that schools value and want is favoured above trying to radically change the types of activities that the EP service can offer to schools.

The DfEE (2000) report: *'Educational Psychology Service (England): Current role, good practice and future directions'* suggests that EPs can offer a breadth of functions to schools alongside the statutory duties that they are required to undertake. Within the traded model of service delivery, the diverse activities offered to schools and other service users can develop EP services in a market-driven economy. This view is emphasised by Fallon et al., (2010) who suggest that EPs may need to develop their professional profile, in relation to the skills and training that they may need, in order to improve their 'saleability' and ability to adapt to service users' needs. However, Fallon et al., (2010) also argue that developing skills in the EP workforce could lead to some EPs preferring to move into private work. The

participants in this study mentioned the visible increase in private EPs which participants felt had developed into a new threat to the service, as privately commissioned EPs become more prevalent as a potential alternative source of support for service users.

The development of private providers and social enterprises has increased the variety of services that can cater for children and young people's needs, thus, EPs within this study emphasised the need to market and sell the service by demonstrating the breadth of skills and experience available within the team in order to retain their 'customers'.

The relevant systems within the problem-situations have emphasised the tensions perceived by EPs regarding how to sustain the service and how to maintain positive working relationships with schools in order to secure, to a certain extent, the likelihood that these schools will continue to buy into the service year-on-year. However, as there are no guarantees about schools continuing to trade and how much they will buy in on annual basis, these are perceived to be stresses on the systems which are an on-going concern for individual EPs, in terms of job insecurity as well as a threat to the service as a whole.

5.4 Research Question 3: What activities could help address the problem situations to improve practice?

This research question related to development of the activities required for the conceptual activity model (Figures 7 and 8). Checkland and Poulter (2006) argue that *'all situations contain people trying to act purposefully'*, rather than acting at random, thus, there are specific activities which can be highlighted as fundamental to the effective and efficient functioning of a system, which EPs were asked to think about in regards to the definitions that they developed.

The discussion associated with this question highlighted the emergence of two superordinate themes: *Capacity within the team* and the *Expectations of EPs*. In regards to *capacity within the team*, this theme was viewed by focus group B as central for ensuring the successful functioning of the EP service as a system in itself. Without a clear awareness of what the budgets for the EP service will look like year-on-year, the EPs in this group viewed the greatest challenge to lie with ensuring that the team had capacity at all times to meet service users' demands.

Contingency-planning and developing skills of the EPs through training and professional development were perceived to be central to ensuring the service continued to develop and survive regardless of the level of buy-back. Allen and Hardy (2013) argue that:

'the future for educational psychologists is, we believe, reliant upon adapting to this rapidly changing environment. Much like past challenges for the profession, the proposed changes to EP service delivery are many and varied.'

(Allen and Hardy, 2013, p.149)

The EPs in focus group B suggested reviewing the model of service delivery, alongside recruiting, to create a robust team of psychologists, and planning for contingencies, as some of the key activities required for the service to meet the challenges of trading whilst maintaining capacity and flexibility in the model (see Figure 8).

The DfEE (2000) report identified that encouraging an emphasis on early intervention and preventative work could enable EPs to develop an effective service, which could also support EP services' awareness of the organisational needs within schools, such as training and professional development. Recognising organisational issues could be used to help plan strategic work which could feasibly be commissioned out as short-term contracts, in order to develop cost-effective practice that would not hinder the on-going activities of the EP allocated to a particular school. Similarly, organisational development work, such as assessing and evaluating the EP service, could be viewed as a way to ensure contingencies are planned and capacity is maintained within the service.

Capacity can also be developed by working collaboratively with schools to demonstrate the range of work EPs are able to undertake (Mackay, 1997; Malipant, 1997) which can then be built into the service plan or SLA shared with schools. The participants in this study asserted that maintaining a transparent and accountable approach to practice would help to clarify the activities that would need to occur for problem situations to be handled with greater effectiveness.

This notion of transparent and accountable practice underpins the superordinate theme of the *Expectations of EPs* that are required in order to ensure best practice. Solity (2013) argues that:

‘EPs have invariably allowed others working within the field of education to define their professional role within mainstream schools’

(Solity, 2013, p.73)

This view stresses the importance for EPs to create clear expectations for themselves and sharing these explicitly with service users in order to clarify expectations and also to broaden the somewhat narrow view that can be taken by other professionals within the educational domain regarding what services and support EPs can provide. Wagner (2000) argues that applying consultation as a framework for service delivery can enable EPs to work in a collaborative, cooperative relationship with schools whilst also explicitly stating the support that they can provide. Consultation is also viewed by Wagner (2000) as an approach which can enable EPs to work with schools as *‘critical friends’* in order to both support the

schools priorities whilst also offering alternative perspectives on challenging situations.

The notion of EPs as 'critical friends' of schools was a question raised within both focus groups, about how far EPs felt they would be able to challenge schools, due to the changing dynamics of the EPs' relationships with schools, as they were identified as both the customers of the EP service and the owners of the systems in which EPs worked, which meant that they had the power to abolish the system the EPs were working within (Checkland and Poulter, 2006). The participants within this study emphasised the importance of maintaining positive relationships with schools, as they perceived challenging schools to be a factor which could place the service at risk of losing contracts with schools.

This raises particular ethical concerns for the EP role and how to manage the relationship with schools as customers, whilst also attempting to work in the best interests of the children they are supporting. To overcome this situation, research suggests that schools do value EPs as critical friends who will advise and also challenge if needed (Dowling and Leibowitz, 1994). It could also be argued that the use of a collaborative framework, such as consultation (Wagner, 2000), could be employed to ensure a clear model of service delivery, alongside the implementation of SLAs, to clarify the key aims and objectives and set out the ethical standards of the EP service to ensure that the needs of children, young people and their families continued to be at the heart of work conducted by EPs without compromising the

relationship EPs have built with schools over time. The AEP (2011) has developed 14 key principles which could be shared with schools and utilised by EP services to ensure that ethical codes of conduct and high standards of practice are utilised throughout the traded work.

5.5 Critique of Soft Systems Methodology

The use of Soft Systems Methodology to elicit EPs' perceptions, as employed in this study, is a novel approach that has not been used with EPs in this way prior to this study, rather EPs have utilised this approach by acting as facilitators within other organisations and teams, such as schools, to support organisational development at a strategic level. Therefore, for future application of SSM to support EPs with organisational development activities, reflecting on this process is significant for understanding the benefits and limitations of using SSM in this context.

5.5.1 SSM techniques

The SSM techniques of drawing the Rich Picture and Conceptual Activity models were effective in developing a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the organisation in which the study was conducted, through the qualitative data gained from the

thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts. Checkland and Poulter (2006) suggest that the aim of Rich Pictures is to:

‘capture, informally, the main entities, structures and viewpoints in the situation, the processes going on, the current recognised issues and potential ones.’

(Checkland and Poulter, 2006, p. 25)

In this study, both drawing techniques enabled all participants in the focus groups to become involved in the process of illustrating and discussing the problems, in an unstructured, informal way, which for some participants, who were less vocal during discussions, enabled an alternative way of capturing their views. The use of these hand-drawn pictures were useful for highlighting to participants that SSM does not produce a neat finished product, rather the working diagrams indicate that SSM is a learning process (Checkland and Poulter, 2006, p.198).

The PQR formula and the conceptual activity models enabled structured discussion to elicit the systems underpinning the problem situations that the groups wanted to focus on. In order to explain the PQR formula and conceptual activity model, I used an example, taken from Checkland and Poulter (2010, p.205), in order to clarify the process that participants were expected to follow. Providing a visual example to the groups (see Appendix 9) appeared to help the groups to understand the process and to focus on the issues identified as opposed to worrying about the structure of the SSM process itself.

The CATWOE analysis was interwoven through the focus group discussion which enabled the groups to think in detail about the purpose of their role and activities. This was useful when moving on to think about the PQR formula and drawing the activity model. Without a discussion about how and why they undertook specific activities, such as report writing or building capacity in the service, the rationale for improving these activities would not have been clear.

5.5.2 SSM process

The process of SSM itself was not familiar to all participants although its original developer, Peter Checkland, argues that familiarity with the process is not necessary in order to achieve useful actions to improve practice (Checkland, 1991). As SSM is a structured process, it enabled participants to see the stages and process that they needed to follow in order to move on to the next stage. Thus, the main strength of this approach was its organised and structured approach to organisational development.

The SSM process is described as:

'An action-oriented process of inquiry into problematical situations...; users learn their way from finding out about the situation to defining / taking action to improve it. The learning emerges via an organised process in which the real situation is explored, using intellectual devices – which serve to structure the discussion.'

(Checkland and Poulter , 2006, p.22)

The organised process referred to in this quote was facilitated by me, as the researcher, through the use of SSM techniques, such as the PQR and CATWOE analysis, which meant that participants were directed through the methodology as opposed to a more open-ended flow of discussion. I am aware that the high level of direction and steering used in order to ensure participants remained focused on the topic, through utilising SSM techniques, may have reduced the breadth of contributions that could have been elicited within the focus group discussions if such a strong structure had not been imposed.

The challenge with using SSM was fully understanding the terminology and the connotations relating to the technical terms, which related to systems approaches: problem situations, conceptual activity models, relevant systems, root definitions, etc. Checkland and Poulter (2006) argue that SSM requires a shift in thinking:

‘SSM had to develop new ways of thinking about the complexity of real-life situations...This shift in thinking means that for many people understanding SSM involves some rearranging of their mental furniture.’

(Checkland and Poulter, 2006, p.xiii)

In the context of the present study, explaining the terminology, and also using the language relating to SSM, could have had negative connotations for participants who were not familiar with this process and its accompanying language.

I was aware that a potential challenge of using SSM is that the language and terminology used are quite specific to systems approaches. It was recognised that this could become a barrier for the successful implementation of this methodology as some of the concepts and techniques were not always straightforward to explain to participants who were unfamiliar with SSM. Thus, in order to explain the SSM approach and techniques used within this methodology, I found that providing visual examples of the SSM process, its techniques and also a glossary of key terms (Appendix 9) at the start of the first focus group session enabled participants to gain a better understanding of the purpose of the techniques and the technical terms used. It would have been beneficial to spend an initial session describing and explaining the process prior to conducting the study; however this was not feasible in the current study due to the limited availability of EPs meeting together at one time.

The SSM process enabled all participants to engage through verbal discussions and through drawing, therefore there was more than one medium for capturing views. The drawings were also valuable for instigating further discussion and reflection both on the SSM process and on the issues elicited over the course of the focus groups. Some participants queried the focus on 'problem situations' which emphasises a focus on negative points, which some EPs struggled to discuss initially. The initial three stages of SSM did not allow EPs to celebrate achievements and positive aspects of becoming a traded service. But during the second focus group session, when the groups began to create the conceptual activity models, participants began to understand the need to explicate the problem situations. I am aware that the focus of the discussions may have been overly narrowed and affected by the emphasis on

the 'problem situation' within the first three stages of the SSM process. Use of this terminology may have led to an emphasis on negatively biasing the view of traded service delivery and minimising any positive outcomes of working within the traded model.

Another notable point is that the perceptions of the EPs participating within this study may have been influenced by the broader context in which they were working at the point in time when this research was conducted, as the traded model had recently, and very rapidly, come into effect. Therefore, this study was conducted during a time of significant changes and stress for the EPs within this service, which may have impacted on the outcomes of this study.

Overall, SSM facilitated in-depth discussions within both groups and enabled participants to guide the discussion to aspects that were relevant to the group, rather than following an area that was donated by the researcher. The process facilitated the discussion effectively from one stage to the next and the creation of the drawings and root definitions helped the groups to remain focused on the issues most pertinent to them. Finally, the SSM approach provided a structured framework which could be replicated in future studies within similar contexts in order to draw further comparisons.

5.5.3 Questionnaires

The purpose of the questionnaires in this study was to gain the views of as many EPs within the service as possible in a time-limited way. The questionnaire served its primary purpose for gaining a breadth of responses in a relatively efficient manner and it also enabled all EPs in the service to become aware of the study being undertaken. Some participants mentioned that the questionnaires created an interest to participate in the focus groups in order to further discuss the issues that were raised. The questionnaire responses were used to instigate discussion in the first focus group, therefore the responses were not analysed beyond examining the frequency of given responses.

Robson (2011) asserts that the wording of questionnaires can influence the responses gained, which I aimed to address by piloting the questionnaire. The language used within SSM such as 'victims', 'beneficiaries' and 'clients' does have implicit connotations relating to power which may have impacted on the responses gained from participants and also may have led to the response rate (65%) as the language may have been viewed as too strong and not providing any middle ground for providing a response.

In future research, it may be useful to use the CATWOE analysis for gauging responses from a questionnaire, but ensuring that the wording for questions is taken

into account, and analysing the patterns emerging and taking any conflict in views, regarding service delivery. As a time efficient method for gaining a breadth of views, the questionnaire served its purpose within this study, whilst also enabling the application of the SSM technique involving the political, cultural and social analysis of the problem situation.

5.5.4 Focus Groups

Running two focus groups in parallel ensured a manageable number of participants in each group: focus group A, n = 5 and focus group B, n= 4, which were optimal for the discussion and the shared drawing activities. Using homogeneous groups, maingrade EPs (focus group A) and Senior EPs (Focus group B), enabled participants to share views pertinent to their professional position within the service. Robson (2011) suggests that there is some criticism regarding the use of homogenous groups within focus groups, due to established dynamics and hierarchies which can influence participants' contributions (p.295); however, Halcomb et al., (2007) suggest that utilising homogenous groups can facilitate communication and promote a sense of safety when expressing ideas.

The SSM process was easily adopted within the focus groups and having two one hour sessions meant that participants were not rushed to proceed to subsequent SSM stages which, therefore, facilitated in-depth discussion and examination of the

concerns raised by participants. If using focus groups in future research using SSM, it would be ideal to have a co-facilitator in order to keep time and help to manage the overall running of the groups; however this was not experienced as a significant issue or hindrance in the present study.

The group discussion did raise some issues around conflicting views, which were not captured in drawings; however the benefit of audio recording meant that these were captured through the transcripts and thematic analysis. This was viewed as the significant strength of using SSM in a focus group, as it facilitated discussion and drawing so that there were different ways of capturing the perspectives of the group and their individual viewpoints too.

5.6 Summary of Chapter

In summary, EPs' perceptions of the traded service delivery model have highlighted concerns, although some EPs viewed the increased opportunities which may develop from trading with schools and other services in terms of working with parents and building partnerships with other services. In terms of the concerns raised by EPs, there appeared to be a different focus for both groups, where maingrade EPs highlighted the pressures of increased workloads and the reduced autonomy and power to control and negotiate the type of activities they were expected to undertake. On the other hand, Senior EPs' perceptions centred on the insecurity of tenure and

the importance of developing a service where jobs were secure and the service could be maintained whilst ensuring that the value and quality of the service delivered was not affected.

The themes emerging also emphasised the significance of EPs experiencing a shift in their professional role to one also encapsulating a business-oriented approach to 'selling' the service, which meant that EPs perceived being increasingly conscious of the expectations placed upon them and how their performance was being judged, both from within the service and by users of the service. With the increased emphasis on providing value for money and ensuring best practice, there was an overwhelming sense that the pressures on the professional role had increased and, for some EPs, it was felt that the professional role had developed in a direction markedly different from the one they had expected when they joined the profession. The EPs responses and perceptions underline the period of flux and upheaval that the EP service is currently experiencing which the service is trying to adapt to in order to continue to provide the service that users are familiar with and will also want to continue to buy into in the future.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter provides a conclusion to the present study, before moving on to explore some of the implications for professional EP practice. This chapter also critiques the methodology employed in this study and examines areas for further research which have developed as a result of this study.

6.2 Conclusion

This study sought EPs' perceptions about the model of service delivery used within the EP service in which I was placed during the second and third year of the doctoral training. EPs highlighted some of the problem situations concerning the traded model of service delivery pertaining to not knowing the budgets beyond the current financial year for either schools or the EP service, which placed pressure on EPs to over-deliver in schools in order to demonstrate the value of the service and highlight the benefits of buying into the EP service to schools.

The systems at work which were underlying these problem situations were perceived to relate to EPs' performance being judged, both from within and outside of the service, in order to ascertain whether the service delivered was value for money, effective and efficient. This, once again, emphasised the pressures placed on EPs to

provide a high quality service. As schools were perceived as 'power-holders' in terms of being able to choose to buy into the service depending on their level of satisfaction, EPs' perceived that they were in a less powerful position to negotiate service delivery. To ensure a significant buy-back in order to maintain the EP service, EPs' perceived that they had to incorporate a marketing function as part of their professional role.

The DFEE Report (2000) stated that the model of service delivery adopted by EP services is often regarded as a significant barrier to providing an effective service to schools. This report suggested that schools often viewed time allocation as a restrictive way of working, which did not enable EPs to respond flexibly to schools' needs. The EPs in this study perceived the traded service delivery model created tensions within the service in terms of increased workloads and pressures on EPs in order to meet schools demands and, more importantly, to keep schools happy. Whilst Acklaw (1990) argues that marketing EP services is central to developing a service that appropriately caters to the needs of the service users', the DFEE Report (2000) highlights that EPs are not always confident in taking on the various different roles expected of them:

'Many feel that whilst their initial training has prepared them for this wider role, the increasing focus of their work on assessments mean that they either lack confidence and/or need additional training to ensure they are able to fulfil the new role expected of them.'

(DFEE, 2000, p.85)

The perceptions of the EPs who participated within this study also stressed the lack of confidence felt by some EPs regarding the additional role as a 'sales person'. This concern was drawn by EPs in focus group A's Rich Picture (see Figure 5.) and also highlighted from the data extracts:

I think the one thing that has changed is that we suddenly have to be sales people and market ourselves and things like that'

(P3, Focus group A)

In order to move to improving practice within the service, EPs suggested the importance of developing greater capacity in the team, through contingency planning, reviewing and evaluating the model of service delivery to ensure it was meeting service users' needs whilst also being manageable for EPs within the team. Maingrade EPs perceived the need to further clarify the expectations placed on EPs, in regards to report writing, to ensure service users were clear about EP involvement and the purpose of EP's reports.

The importance of providing the best service possible appeared to underpin all the themes elicited from both groups, although both groups found that this often conflicted with other professional responsibilities, such as managerial demands and crisis situations, which meant limited time for reflecting on their practice.

6.3 Implications for EP Practice

When this study was conducted, the EP service had been working in the traded service delivery model for over a year and half, therefore there had been time for the service to review and identify areas that required further improvement. The use of SSM in this study enabled the participants to further examine areas that were perceived to be a continuing barrier to effective service delivery. The changes that the focus groups devised through the conceptual activity models were practical activities, such as 'making a plan for data gathering' (Figure 7. Step 2) and 'Have a clear vision of what we can deliver' (Figure 8. Step 2), which could be incorporated into practice, in order to improve practice.

However, the initial enthusiasm for changes made to service delivery can soon be followed by the service and individuals beginning to slip back into the old ways of working and practices that were viewed as ineffective. This view is highlighted by Wright et al., (1995) where it is argued that:

'the lingering anxiety which accompanies any major change is that after the initial flush of enthusiasm has worn off, staff (and management) commitment may begin to dwindle and things may begin to settle into the old, comfortable position where they were before.'

(Wright et al., 1995, p.14)

Therefore, any changes to the model of service delivery need to be supported across all structures of the organisation in order to improve and alter previous, possibly ineffective practices.

Wright et al., (1995) suggest some strategies, outlined in Figure 9, below, which could be utilised to support EP services, once changes have been agreed, in order to reduce the chances of EPs returning to previous ways of working.

Figure 13.

- *Focus on those processes which are central to the service, such as developing a shared view of effective practice for service users, that require improvement;*
- *Measuring and documenting key work processes in ways which allow improvement suggestions to be generated. This could be undertaken using the PQR formula and Conceptual Activity model from SSM;*
- *Actively seeking more effective / innovatory approaches which could be used to manage problems faced within EP practice;*
- *Creating a learning organisation, by sharing success and difficult experiences in order to identify the implications for the service with a view to developing areas that are causing difficulties.*

Strategies to support changes to EP service delivery (Adapted from Wright et al., 1995, p.14)

The issues relating to the *expectations on EPs* and the development of further *capacity within the service delivery model* can be viewed as broader organisational issues stemming from developing and altering the service delivery model, which writers such as Burden (1999) and more recently Fox (2009) have suggested can be tackled effectively through systems approaches. Fox (2009) asserts that the use of systemic techniques such as the development of a '*reflecting team*' (p.255) can be used to '*reflect in action*' through the use of peer supervision, which he suggests,

enables individuals and teams to view the systems in which they work from different perspectives, which in turn can help move their thinking forward about particular problem situations.

Clarifying the *expectation on EPs* could also help to market the service. Some writers (Maliphand, 1997; Leadbetter, 2000; Mackay 2002; Ashton and Roberts, 2006) have argued that in order to ensure the future survival and success of the EP profession, the role and activities provided by the EP services need to be explicitly stated. The EP service involved in this study have begun to develop a 'menu' of activities that the service can use to support schools across different levels (i.e. individual, group and whole school), through the utilisation of the key functions of the EP service, as described by the Scottish Executive report (2002) (consultation, assessment, intervention, training and research) which has made the process of 'buying into' the service more transparent for service users, in regards to being aware of the support they can expect to receive. The participants in this study also highlighted that explicitly stating the cost of gaining ad hoc advice and support from the EP service through SLA meetings at the outset of the financial year, had been positively received by schools who had, in the past, complained about the lack of flexibility in the EP role (Imich, 1999).

Allen and Hardy (2013) suggest that the key to a successful future for the EP profession as a whole, in light of the shift to trading, is in adapting to the changes (p.149). Hence, the ability to adapt is viewed as central to successfully trading, which

can be developed through organisational development models, such as SSM, as advocated by writers such as, Burden (1999) and Frederickson (1990a).

6.3.1 Ethical Implications within Traded Context

The ethical guidelines which underpin the professional practice of EPs, as discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4.3, highlight some of the potential challenges and opportunities within the traded EP service context.

The HCPC (2012) Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists highlight the importance of understanding the power balance between practitioners and service users. The findings from this study indicated that prior to becoming a traded service the participants perceived that they had greater autonomy and control over their work and level of involvement, moving to a traded model meant that they felt that schools had greater control and power in terms of directing EPs' work.

Fallon et al. (2010) and Allen and Hardy (2013) stress the need for EPs and EP services to work flexibly and adapt within the changing socio-political context, whilst recognising that the core skills of EPs would continue to be central to the contribution of the EP role:

'EPs will continue to use the skills and tools they have developed... but the way in which their work is contracted has changed, will continue to change, and will vary between local authorities more than in the past; professional

flexibility and adaptability in the application of psychology are now essential skills rather than a valuable addition'

(Fallon et al., 2010, p. 14)

In developing a flexible approach to service delivery within a traded context, the HCPC (2012) also emphasises the importance for EPs to work proactively and preventatively to promote the psychological wellbeing of service users. This principle is also mentioned within the AEP (2010) 'Principles for the Delivery of Educational Psychology Services' which asserts that EP services should be equally accessible for all service users and that EPs should be able to undertake the full range of work as outlined in 'A review of the functions and contribution of educational psychologists in England and Wales in light of "every child matters: change for children' (Farrell et al., 2006).

The findings in this study indicate that the breadth of the EP role has broadened due to working within the traded service delivery model, which has led to EPs' becoming involved in a variety of activities such as training, therapeutic work and research. Thus, the shift to becoming a traded service could be viewed as providing an opportunity for EPs and services to expand their skills and broaden the profile of activities that are offered to service users.

The AEP (2011) report suggests that as traded service delivery models are developed, EP services will require advice on marketing, budgeting and other financial planning; however the development of traded EP service delivery models

must be founded in the ethical principles which govern the professional practice of EPs and ensure EP services maintain a high standard of service for all service users.

From the findings of this study, the theme 'Expectations of EPs' highlighted the increased level of accountability and professional responsibility when providing services to schools and other service users. This responsibility also extends to accurately representing the financial parameters of trading with schools and working with other service users. The BPS (2009) emphasises the need to ensure that contractual relationships are explicitly stated and fully explained, including financial commitments made by service users in order to clarify what they should expect from EP services.

Findings from large scale reviews of the professional practice of EPs (Kelly and Gray, 2000; Farrell et al., 2006) identified that lack of clarity about the EPs' role and contribution led to dissatisfaction with EP involvement. Thus, clarifying expectations prior to undertaking work within schools could be viewed as a positive aspect of working within a traded service model.

6.4 Future Research

The present study focused on EPs' perceptions within one EP service. To develop the findings from this study, it would be useful to conduct further action research

studies, which could use SSM to structure the organisational development process, in order to compare the findings from this study to the perceptions of EPs in other services, using different models of service delivery for trading. The use of a structured methodology (SSM) means that the process utilised in this study could be replicated within other services in order to increase the generalisability of this study in light of other research findings.

Also, this study focused on gaining EPs' perceptions of the traded service delivery model and did not gain views of the service users who 'buy into' the EP service. Thus, there could be scope for further research conducted into gaining the views of schools, parents and other service users on trading with the EP service, which could help this EP service to review and monitor the model of service delivery to ensure the needs of service users are being effectively met.

The outcomes of the present study were shared with the EP service and actions to improve practice have been further discussed in order to build on the outcomes of the conceptual activity models. Thus, it could be feasible to work with this EP service to complete a further iteration of the SSM process in order to view improvements as well as further refining the issues presenting within the service in order to further develop the service delivery model. As this study undertook the first application of SSM within an EP service, further uses of this methodology in this context would also be useful for eliciting the most effective way of applying this methodology in order to

enhance the applicability of SSM as an organisational development framework within EP services.

6.5 Concluding Comments

This study has elicited the perceptions of EPs working within a traded service delivery model in order to develop practical actions to support the improvement of the service. Using Soft Systems Methodology, this study has highlighted EPs' perceptions on the problem situations arising from working in the traded service delivery model and has viewed the underpinning systems within these problem situations, in order to move towards improving these situations, within a rapidly changing political and economic climate. This study has emphasised the need for the EP service to continue to adapt to meet the needs of both service users and the EPs working within the service, in order to maintain and secure the future of the service within a traded context.

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Appendix 1

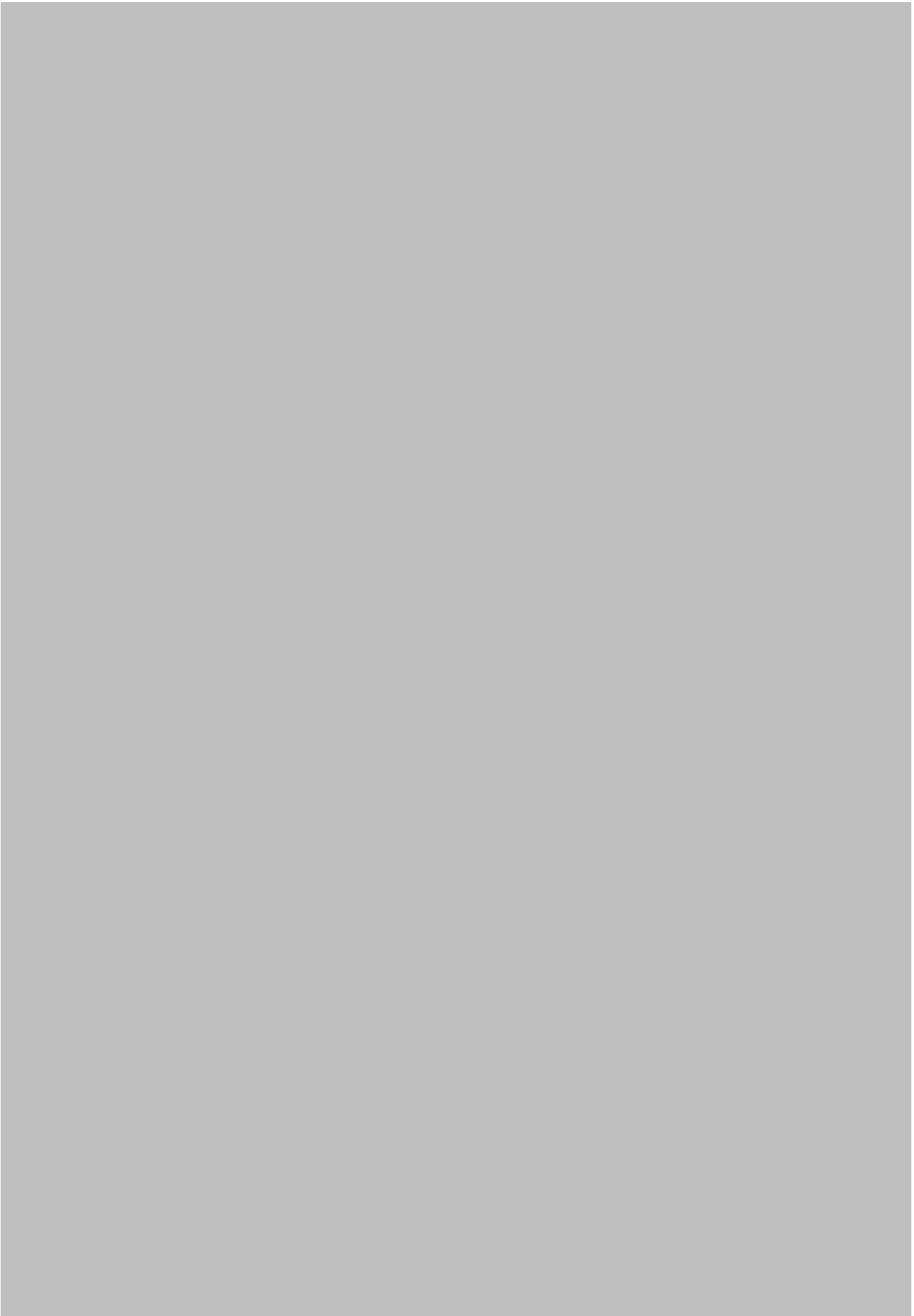
Organisational development approaches considered for the present study

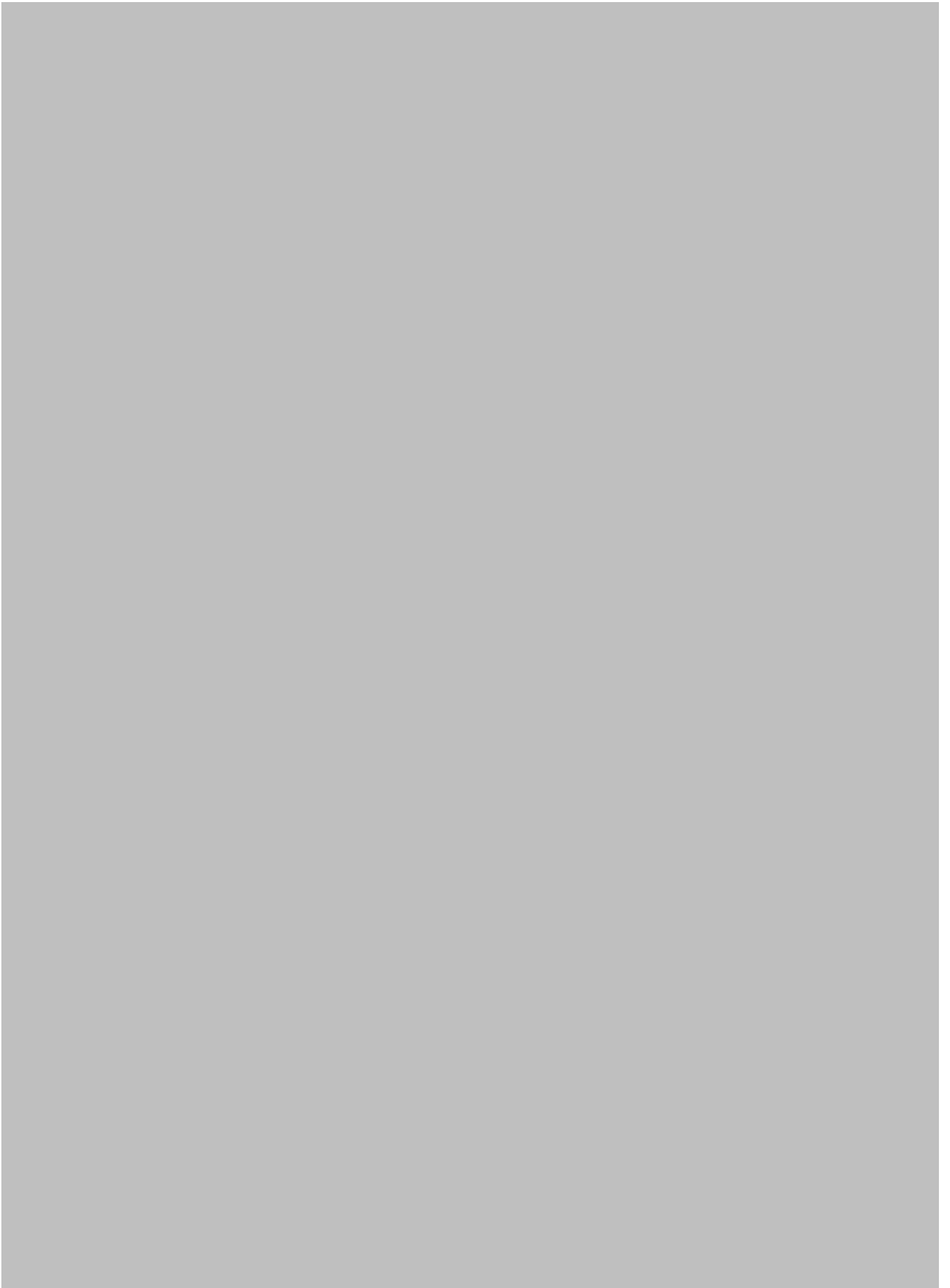
Model / Approach	Details	Aims	Strengths	Limitations
Activity Theory	Roots in cultural-historical psychology. Method of understanding and analysing phenomenon, finding patterns and making inferences	Activities are goal-directed or purposeful interactions of subject with objects, through the use of a tool.	It is specifically orientated toward the analysis and design of the basic elements of human work activity: tasks, tools, methods, objects and results, and the skills, experience and abilities of involved subjects.	It specifically focuses on the interrelationship between the structure and self-regulation of work activity and the configuration of its material components.
Appreciative Inquiry	Organisational Development method that seeks to engage all levels of an organisation (including customers and suppliers)	To renew, change and improve performance within the organisation as a whole	Starts with the belief that every organisation and every person has positive aspects that can be built upon	Does not identify the organisation as it is and what the situation looks like. It focuses on the identification of what's working well and the aspects that could work well in the future
PATH	PATH was developed by Jack Pearpoint, Marsha Forest and John O'Brien from 1991 onwards. It can be used as a planning style with individuals and with organisations.	When used in person centred planning, the person and the people she wants to invite meet together with two facilitators to work through the process.	PATH works well when an individual has a group of people around her who are committed to making things happen. Using the PATH process enables people to understand and take control of the situation.	Not centred on systems, rather it is a person-centred approach, which means that it can be difficult to implement actions as the systems will not support coordination of any actions that need to be undertaken as part of the approach outcomes.

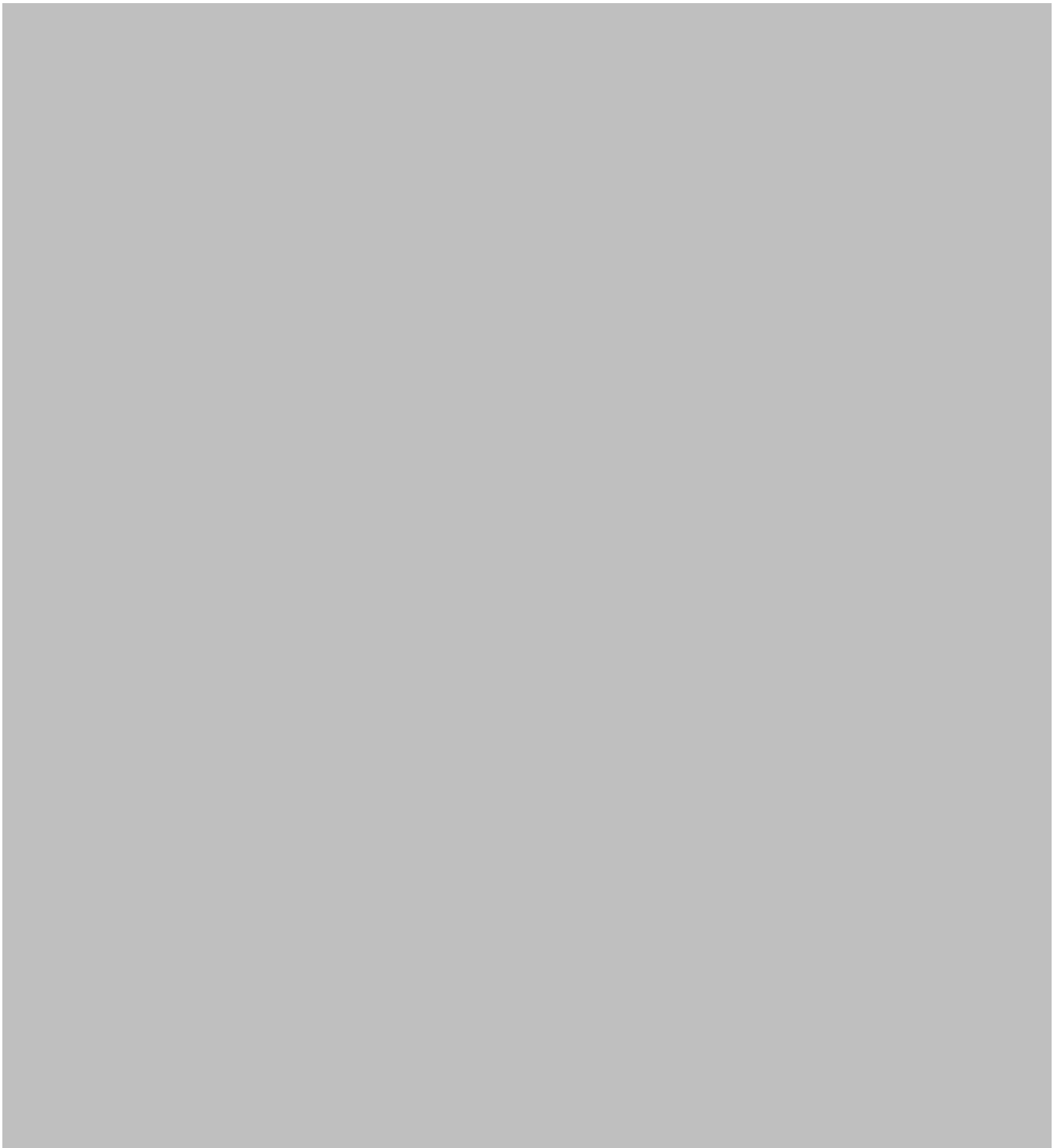
Forcefield Analysis	<p>Describe your plan or proposal for change in the middle.</p> <p>List all forces for change in one column, and all forces against change in another column.</p> <p>Assign a score to each force, from 1 (weak) to 5 (strong).</p>	<p>By carrying out the analysis you can plan to strengthen the forces supporting a decision, and reduce the impact of opposition to it.</p> <p>Analyses the pressures for and against change</p>	<p>Force Field Analysis is a useful technique for looking at all the forces for and against a plan. It helps you to weigh the importance of these factors and decide whether a plan is worth implementing.</p> <p>Where you have decided to carry out a plan, Force Field Analysis helps you identify changes that you could make to improve it.</p>	<p>Process is subjective and requires collaborative thinking and agreement</p> <p>Concerning forces for and against the solution to a particular problem.</p> <p>May oversimplify the relationships between factors that impact a problem.</p> <p>All aspects of a problem may not be identified.</p>
Soft Systems Methodology	<p>SSM is a systemic approach for tackling real-world problematic situations-Soft Systems Methodology is the result of the continuing action research that Peter Checkland.</p>	<p>SSM does not differentiate between 'soft' and 'hard' problems, it merely provides a different way of dealing with situations perceived as problematic.</p> <p>SSM treats the notion of system as an epistemological rather than ontological entity, i.e., as a mental construct used for human understanding.</p>	<p>SSM gives structure to complex organisational and political problem situations, and it can allow them to be dealt with in an organised manner. It forces the user to look for a solution that is more than technical.</p> <p>It is a rigorous tool that can be used in 'messy' problems.</p> <p>Uses specific techniques.</p>	<p>SSM requires participants to adapt the overall approach.</p> <p>Be careful not to narrow the scope of the problem too early.</p> <p>It is difficult to assemble the richest picture without imposing a particular structure and solution on the problem situation.</p> <p>People have difficulties to interpret the world in the loose way.</p> <p>They often show an over-urgent desire for action.</p>

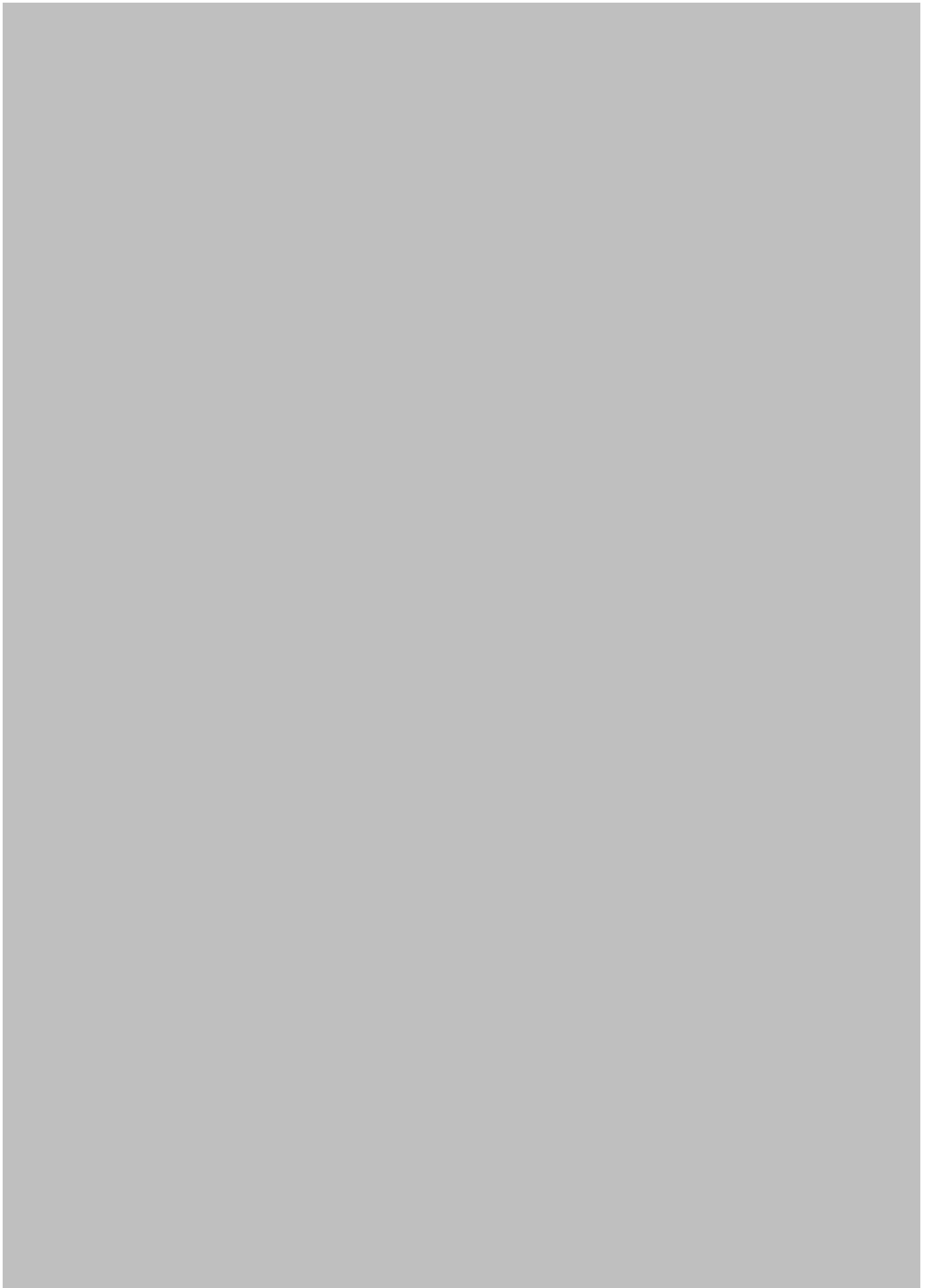




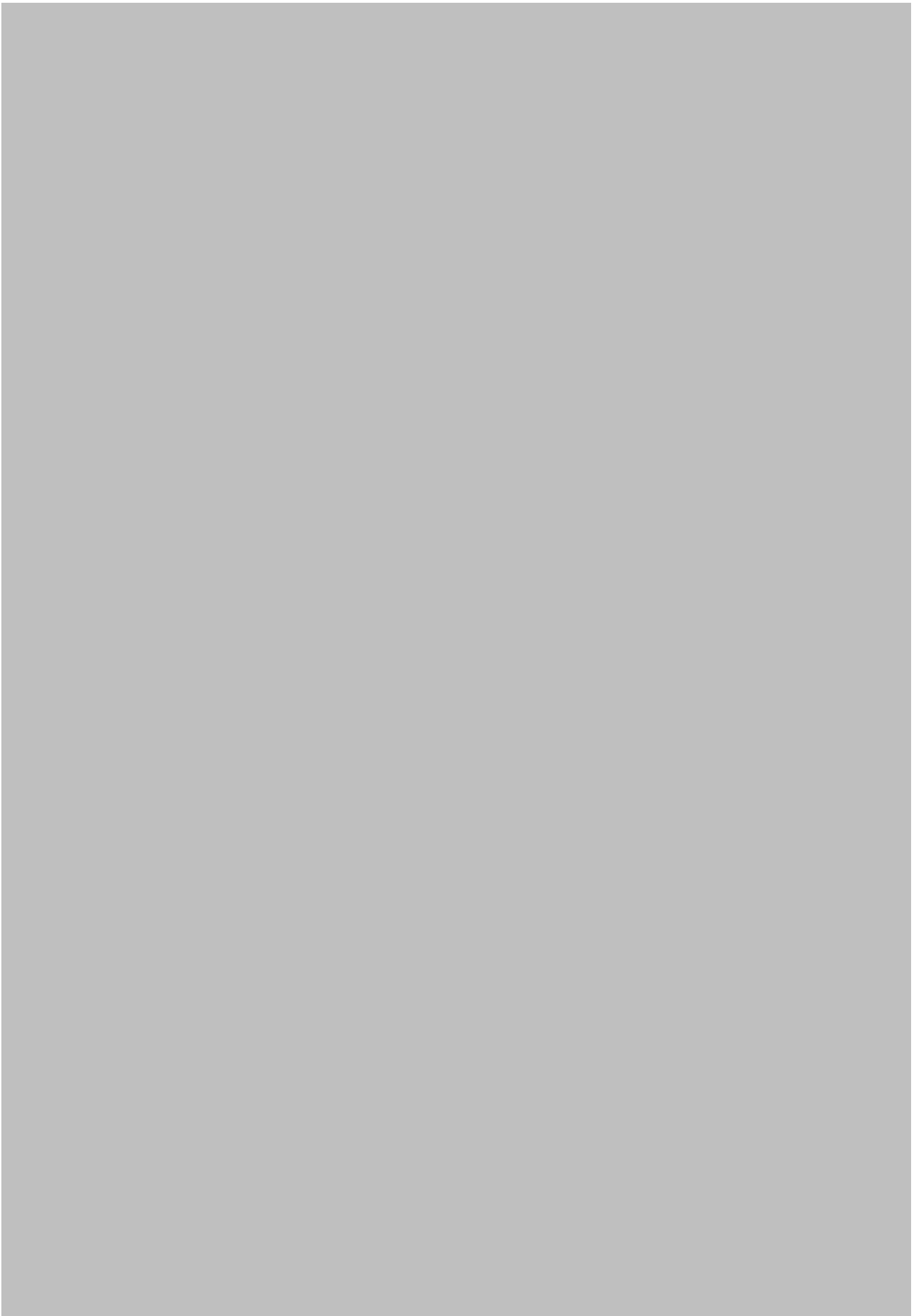


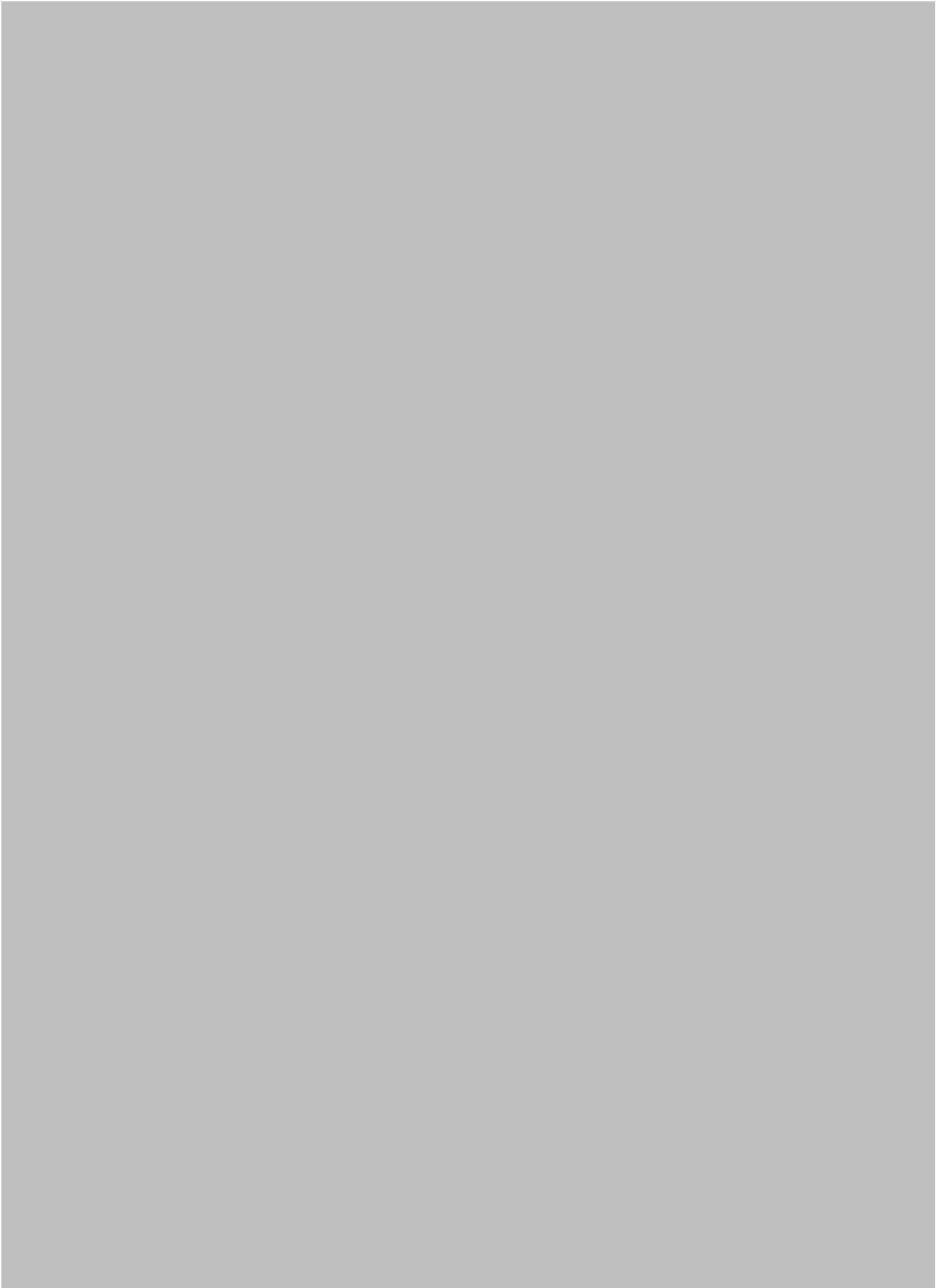














Appendix 3

Research Proposal Presentation

Research Proposal for Volume One of Thesis

Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctorate
University of Birmingham

Snah Islam
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Research Proposal

- Working title
- Rationale
- Aim
- Research Questions
- Design
- Data Collection
- Data Analysis

Working Title

An investigation into Educational Psychologist's perceptions of traded service delivery within a Local Authority, using a Soft Systems Methodology approach.

Research Rationale

- Call for EPs to identify what is unique and useful about their role to ensure 'value for money' (Gillham, 1978).
- Large scale research studies undertaken to gain views about the practice and role of EPs.
- Leadbetter (2000) Questionnaires sent to every PEP in England and Wales.
- Farrell et al. (2006) large scale study with views of parents, schools and EPs.
- Other studies developed deeper knowledge of context of EPS and individual practice:
- Fallon, Woods and Rooney (2010) Illuminative Case Study of one EPS showing how restructure of EPS has increased breadth of role and range of functions.

Research Rationale

- Local Context:
- Financial restraints and budget cuts in 2010 used as an opportunity to develop a trading element within the Educational Psychology Service.
- In 2011, the EPS developed a fully traded model of Service Delivery, which incorporates a structured framework for practice.
- The traded model has been discussed and reviewed by Schools and EPs to ensure it enables effective practice.

Research Aim

- To explore Educational Psychologist's perceptions of a traded Service Delivery model in order to identify problems and improve practice.

Research Questions

- What do EP's perceive as problem situations arising from the traded service delivery model?
- What relevant systems are perceived to be operating within the problem situations?
- What activities would help address the problem situation to improve practice?
- Can SSM help to bring about organisational change and improve practice within the EPS?

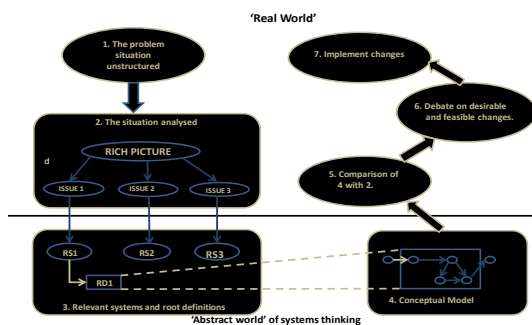
Soft Systems Methodology

- Checkland defines Soft Systems Methodology as...

"an organised way of tackling perceived problematical (social) situations. It is action- oriented. It organises thinking about such situations so that action to bring about improvement can be taken" (Checkland & Poulter, 2006, p. xv)

- Soft Systems Methodology:
 - includes a range of tools
 - can be used alone, or alongside other tools
 - structures thinking and learning
 - makes sense of the complexity in a manner that informs decision-making in a timely way

The essential nature of SSM (From Checkland, 1986)



Data Collection- Phase One

- Self-completed, semi-structured Questionnaire emailed to all EPs within the EPS, to collate all views.
- The questions will be based on six key elements needed for a clearly defined system: 'CATWOE':

- C – Customers (Victims/ beneficiaries of the system)
- A – Actors (who carry out the activities of the system)
- T – Transformation process (what the system does to its inputs to turn them into outputs)
- W – World view (the view of the world that makes this system meaningful)
- O – Owner (who could abolish this system)
- E – Environmental constraints (what in the environment this system takes as a given).

Data Analysis – Phase One

- The purpose of the Questionnaire is to gain all EPs perceptions on the 'problem situation unstructured', in a time-saving way that avoids initiating analysis or narrowing of focus too soon.
- Responses to each element in the questionnaire will be collated to present the views of the EPS as a whole to the Focus Group.
- The responses to the 6 elements (CATWOE) will be shared with the Focus Group under each heading, in order to provide a basis for instigating discussion.

Data Collection – Phase Two

- A Focus Group consisting of 6- 8 EPs.
- Process of Focus Group:
 - Based upon findings from the questionnaires, using CATWOE to build up a 'Rich Picture' of the current situation as a diagram.
 - Creating a 'Root Definition' to illuminate ways in which aspects of the problem situation can be changed.
 - Then creating a conceptual activity model of the system to highlight the activities needed for the system to work effectively.
 - Conceptual model compared to Rich Picture, in order to look at aspects that can feasible be improved.
 - An action plan created that could be implemented for a short period of time, e.g. half a term.

Data Collection – Phase Two

- Following the implementation of change as agreed by the group, second Focus Group, with same participants, will be conducted to discuss any changes and difficulties that may have arisen.
- The Group may undertake a further iteration of the process to adapt conceptual models to bring about other changes.
- Discussion around the utility of SSM as an approach for bringing about change.

Data Analysis – Phase Two

- The recording from both Focus Groups transcribed and then thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006), focusing on the following areas, which link back to the research questions:
 - Problem situations arising from traded service delivery.
 - Systems that are perceived to be operating within these situations.
 - What activities were identified to help address the problem situation.
 - Views of the group around the use of SSM to bring about change.

Appendix 4

Research Advertisement

Research Title: An Investigation into Educational Psychologists' Perceptions of Traded Service Delivery within a Local Authority, Using Soft Systems Methodology.

Dear Colleague,

As part of the Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology, that I am currently undertaking, I plan to conduct research that will form part of my Doctoral Thesis as a student at the University of Birmingham. This study will focus on how Educational Psychologists (EPs) within the service view the traded service delivery model.

I have chosen to investigate EPs' perceptions of traded service delivery as there is a wealth of research about EP service delivery and its impact on the role and practice of EPs; however little research has been conducted about the impact of working within a traded service delivery model and no research about EPs' perceptions of how this model may affect practice and changes to the professional role.

This research will be conducted in 2 stages and will be structured using Soft Systems Methodology, which is described as: *'an organised way of tackling messy situations in the real world. It is based on systems thinking, which enables it to be highly defined and described, but is flexible in use and broad in scope.'*

(Checkland & Scholes, 1990, p.1)

In the first stage of the research a questionnaire will be emailed to all the EP's within the service in order to gather a broad view of how the service is viewed. This information will then be used to instigate discussion in subsequent focus groups.

The second stage will consist of recruiting EPs from the service, in order to conduct 2 focus group sessions with 2 groups of participants. It is hoped that by capturing the views of as many EP's within the service as possible, the data will provide an authentic

reflection of EPs' perceptions and the issues arising on this subject, which will serve to bring about meaningful outcomes for all the EPs within the service.

The research will follow the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society. Participation in this research will be voluntary, requiring informed consent, and participants can withdraw from the research up to the start of the focus groups, without needing to give a reason. Both the Educational Psychology Service and participants will retain anonymity and subsequent data will not be identifiable to any individual.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information:

[Redacted contact information]

[Redacted contact information]

[Redacted contact information]

[Redacted contact information]

[Redacted contact information]

[Redacted contact information]

Appendix 5

Questionnaire Information sheet

Dear Colleague,

I am conducting research into Educational Psychologists' (EP) perceptions of the issues around the traded service delivery model that the Educational Psychology Service is currently using as a framework to structure EPs work with schools, families and Children. I am conducting this research as a student of the University of Birmingham. I intend to explore this area as it is a relatively new issue that has begun to arise in relation to EP practice and the impact of trading on the EP role.

I am asking all the EPs in this service to complete the attached questionnaire as no one knows the issues around traded service delivery better than those working within this model.

The attached questionnaire forms part of my investigation. May I invite you to spend a short amount of time on completing it?

If you are happy to complete the questionnaire, please answer the questions in as much detail as you can and email back to me at: [redacted] or complete a hard copy and return to me in the office.

The questionnaire will take around 15 minutes to complete. It asks for your comments on the traded service delivery model and does not require any personal details to be given. You do not need to write your name, and you will not be identified or traced. The information from the questionnaires will be used to initiate discussion in follow-up focus groups. Outcomes from this research will be written up within my doctoral thesis.

If you wish to discuss any aspects of this research please do not hesitate to contact me on:

Email: s [redacted]

Telephone: [redacted]

I hope that you will feel able to participate. May I thank you, in advance, for your valuable co-operation.

Yours Sincerely,

Snah Islam

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Birmingham

Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions in relation to the educational psychology traded service delivery model in which you are working. In the questions 'system' corresponds to the 'Educational Psychology Service' in which you work. Feel free to expand the boxes or use additional paper to elaborate your answers if needed.

In regard to your views on the context of traded service delivery:

1. Who is / are the client(s)? (victim or beneficiary of the system):

2. Who is / are the problem solver(s)? (Who carries out activities in the system):

3. Who would be regarded as the problem owners in this system?

In regard to your views on some social aspects of traded service delivery:

4. What rules exist within the system that must be followed?

5. What roles are acceptable for you take in the system?

6. How is EP performance judged within the system?

7. What are the expectations of EPs within the system?

In regard to your views on the political aspects of traded service delivery:

8. What are the sources or commodities of power in the system?

9. What issues around access to and control of information influence and constrain the system?

10. What environmental factors influence and constrain the system?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Please contact Snah Islam on [REDACTED] if you have any questions or would like any further information.

References

Checkland, P. and Scholes, J. (1990) Soft Systems Methodology in Action, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons

Appendix 6

Raw data from the Questionnaires

Question focus	Responses (number of participants)
Clients / Problem - Owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Young People (9) • Family (9) • Schools and Staff (8) • Community (4) • Other Agencies (CAMHS & LACES) (3)
Problem-solvers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPs / TEPs (9) • School staff (9) • Parents (5) • Children and Young People(2) • EPS Admin Staff (2) • Other Agency Professionals (3)
Rules in the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Schools request (8) • Agreed Service delivery (Not understood well by schools?)(7) • Time constraints(4) • EPs accountable to Clients (4) • LA Procedures (2) • Statutory deadlines and duties (2) • Maintaining relationships with Clients (4)
Acceptable roles in the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whatever required from EPs / Flexible to accommodate changing demands (4) • Traded Service Model (1) • (EPs enable) Access to provision and resources for CYP (3) • Good communicator (3)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal skills (2) • Psychological knowledge (1) • Supervisor / Supervisee (2) • Trainer (2) • Assessor (3) • Consultant (1) • Facilitator (1) • Marketing and development of service (1)
How EP performance judged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of buy-back (3) • School feedback (2) • Evaluation of training delivered (1) • Performance management in supervision (2) • Paperwork (2) • Statutory duties met to deadlines (1) • Continuing professional development.(2)
Expectations of EPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To meet demands of school's buy-back (4) • Deliver service that schools want more of (3) • Keep schools happy (2) • Apply psychology in the system (1) • Statutory Duties (4) • Reliable service (2) • Account for use of time (5) • Credit planning meetings (6) • Good relationships with clients (4) • Follow service guidelines (3)
Sources of power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools / HTs/ SENCo's (2)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School's budgets (3) • LA / Director of LA / Children's Service Managers (2) • Perceptions of EPS as a traded service – efficient & Cost Effective (1) • EPs have to be sales people and market service (1) • ECPS (1)
Access and control of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools/ LA not knowing budgets (5) • Inaccurate referral information (4) • LA Protocols/ data protection / child protection (2) • Parental consent (4) • Restrictions on developing service in new markets (4)
Environmental factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government / LA Budget cuts (5) • Staff shortages (2) • Changes in national policy and legislation to statutory role (SEN Green paper (4) • Further development of service delivery model (2) • Schools as clients and purchasers (1) • Schools more demanding about how service is delivered (1) • Good quality admin support (2)

Appendix 7

Information Sheet for Focus Groups

An Investigation into Educational Psychologists' perceptions of traded service delivery, using Soft Systems Methodology.

Dear Colleague

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this focus group. I am conducting a small scale investigation as a student of the University of Birmingham. My research will investigate Educational Psychologists' (EP) perceptions of the issues around the traded service delivery model that this Educational Psychology Service is currently using as a framework to structure EPs work with schools, families and Children. I intend to explore this area as it is a relatively new issue that has begun to arise in relation to EP practice and the EP role. This research will form part of my doctoral thesis as part of my training at the University of Birmingham.

The research questions are:

- What do EP's perceive as problem situations arising from the traded service delivery model?
- What relevant systems are perceived to be operating within the problem situations?
- What activities would help address the problem situation to improve practice?

As part of my research, I will be conducting two focus groups which will be structured using Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland and Scholes, 1990) to enable a discussion around the service delivery model. The methodology will be shared with the group before any discussion is commenced and you will be asked to sign a consent form if you are happy to participate in the focus groups.

The focus groups will last between 1 – 2 hours and data collected will be retained anonymously. Participants' personal details will not be recorded. The focus groups will be audio recorded with participants' permission but the recording will only be accessed by me, for the purpose of transcription and analysing the information. No names or

personal details will be stored with any of the information gathered (written or audio recorded). Participants will be free to withdraw or leave the group any point; however it will not be possible to remove data once the focus group has begun. Research findings and excerpts from the focus groups may be shared with a wider audience, e.g. university, EPS or for the publications, but individuals will not be identifiable. Findings will be presented to the Educational Psychology Service as a whole.

If you have any questions, or need to contact me following the focus groups, please feel free to contact me at ***** Educational and Child Psychology Service on: ***** or email: snah.islam@*****.gov.uk. Thank you.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Snah Islam', with a stylized, cursive script.

Snah Islam

Trainee Educational Psychologist

References

Checkland, P. and Scholes, J. (1990) Soft Systems Methodology in Action, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons

Appendix 8

Informed Consent Form

Research Title: **An investigation into Educational Psychologists perceptions of traded service delivery within a Local Authority, using a Soft Systems Methodology approach**

Name of Researcher: Mrs Snah Islam (Trainee educational psychologist)

1. I have read and understood the attached information sheet giving details of the research.
2. I have had the opportunity to ask the researcher (Snah Islam) any questions about my involvement in the research, and understand my role in the research.
3. My decision to consent is voluntary and I understand that I am free to withdraw or leave the focus group at any time, but it will not be possible to remove data collected once the focus group has begun.
4. I understand that the data gathered during this study will be used within my thesis and as part of the briefing to the service once my research is complete.
5. I understand that my name will not be used in any report, publication or presentation, and that every effort will be made to protect my confidentiality.

If you have any further questions regarding this study please contact Snah Islam:

Email: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Participant's signature:

Participant's name :

Date:

Attachment: *Information Sheet*

Appendix 9

Focus Group Script

Resources

Flip chart paper

Blu tack

Felt tip pens

Cards with 9 areas

Ground rules on flip chart paper

Diagram of SSM process

Information sheet and consent letter

INTRODUCTION

I am conducting research into gaining the views of EP's regarding the some of the problem-situations that may arise due to working in a traded service delivery model.

I will be using Soft Systems Methodology which is a framework which uses certain techniques to elicit views and actions to improve an identified situation.

Soft Systems Methodology is based on taking a perceived real-world problem-situation, such as how the EP service is delivered, and develop thinking around key areas that are problematic and would like to focus on as a group.

I have collated the responses from the questionnaires that I sent out as a starting point to begin a discussion around how the traded service delivery model is perceived. As part of this discussion one of you (or more of you) will draw a visual representation of one or a couple problematic aspects on flip chart paper, based on the views of the group. This is known as the 'rich picture' in Soft Systems Methodology. In the second focus group, which will be sometime in the autumn term, we will move to developing models that will be compared to the rich picture to find aspects you as a group would like to take action on.

This group will last for about an hour and I will be audio recording the discussion which will be transcribed and analysed for my university research. All the things said in this room will be confidential and your names will not appear in any of the feedback.

I will use the information gathered here as the basis for the second focus group in the autumn and outcomes from both focus groups and the other focus group will be

shared during a whole service development day, either later next term or in the new year.

If you feel uncomfortable with any of the things being discussed, you can leave the room at any point during the group, but it will not be possible to remove data that I have recorded. Any data used will be anonymous and confidentiality will be maintained.

In your packs there is an information sheet and consent letter. Could you read through the information sheet and if you are happy to take part please sign the consent form and return to me.

[Begin Audio Recording]

GROUND RULES

Just so that everyone does feel comfortable enough to talk openly there are some ground rules that I have noted here that I hope you will all agree with, are there any others that need to be added.

Ground Rules could include:

Pass if you want to

Listen to others views

Respect others views

Confidentiality

Have fun!

Any others?

ACTIVITY

In your packs there is a hand-out with a table of the collated responses from the questionnaires. Could you please spend a minute or two looking through the responses in that table?

Spread cards out on the table

I have got cards here that relate to the 9 areas of traded service delivery that were in the questionnaire

Point to cards and read out what each one says

When you completed the questionnaire you may have found some questions that highlighted problems within the service delivery model currently being used.

Place Most Problematic within the System and Least Problematic within the System Cards on table

Working together as a group, I would like you to agree which area or areas you think are most / least problematic in the traded service delivery model, placing the ones you find most problematic here downwards to the one you find least problematic here, there are no right or wrong answers.

You have about 10 minutes to have a chat together and rank these cards. If there is an aspect that is not included that you would like to include please use the paper and pens to write it down and to rank it too.

Once cards have been ranked move onto discussion or stop the group after 5 minutes.

DISCUSSION

Let's have a look at how you have ranked these activities:

Qu 1. Why have you put this card as the most problematic?

Qu 2. Why is this area least problematic?

Prompt: *Why did you add this activity? Are you all in agreement? Is there any aspect that you feel as a group has not been included that is important?*

RICH PICTURE

Would one or a couple of you volunteer to draw out what the problem situation in this area you ranked as most problematic, using the views of the group. Use arrows to show relationships between different elements in the problem-situation.

Prompt: This drawing can focus on one specific element from the cards you ranked or visually represent the service delivery model at a broader level.

Qu 3 SSM states that it is how you view the world that makes a situation or system meaningful. This can be perceived as your world view. Could you think of how this situation may be viewed differently from other world views?

Prompt: Other services / schools/ parents.

Qu 4. Based on your rich picture and discussions you can now formulate a root definition of your problem situation using the mnemonic: CATWOE

Customers- Who benefits/ is victim of the system

Actors – Who carry out the activities in this system

Transformation – What the system does to its inputs to turn them into outputs (need for X transformed into 'need for X met)

World view – What view of the world makes this system meaningful

Owners- Who could abolish this system

Environmental constraints – What in the environment does the system take as a given

OR use PQR

Do P by Q in order to achieve R

e.g. A system to do P. How (Q) and the reasons for doing this (R).

DEBRIEF

Thank you for taking part in the activity today, and I hope you have enjoyed yourselves.

You have an information sheet to take away with you, which mentions all the things we talked about at the beginning of the group, in case you have any further questions.

And as I mentioned earlier, there will be a second focus group in the autumn term to complete the process. I hope you have enjoyed participating in this group and I hope you will be able to join for the second group.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Focus Group 2 Script

Recap of previous Focus Group

The last Focus Group addressed Traded Service Delivery as a 'problem situation' and you were asked to look at this as a system which could be improved through the use of this methodology which is an approach to looking at problem situations in order to find aspects that could be improved. Last time you started by drawing out the problem situation as you viewed it as a group in the Rich Picture.

Then we looked at creating a definition of this system, by using this PQR formula, which helps to draw out exactly what the system is aiming to achieve and how it tries to do this. As we did not a definition of this system using the PQR, this is where will start today as this will enable the group to focus on a specific area that is problematic within the Rich Picture. Focusing on one problematic situation will help to build an activity model that will enable us to think about ways to improve that issue.

I will use examples to help clarify my explanations. At the end of the group I will provide a de-brief and have a short evaluation form that I would like you all to complete. I will also act as time-keeper to ensure we finish within the hour.

5 mins (10mins)

In the last group you created a rich picture, from which I would like you to think about a specific area or issue that you view as problematic to focus on. Could you spend about 5 minutes to talk about the key issues that you felt came out of the rich picture.

...Discussion...

5 mins (15 mins)

Could you note down 3 or 4 activities that you agree as a group could benefit from improvement?

10 mins (25 mins)

These activities can be used as part of the PQR formula, which I'll explain by giving an example of a PQR formula to explain what I mean.

The PQR stands for What, How and Why.

Do (What)...., by...(How) to achieve ...(Why) or Do P, by Q, to achieve R

So for example, if I think about painting my fence as a simple activity system:

I want to paint my fence by hand painting to enhance the appearance of my property – here's what the definition would look like.

I paint my fence, by hand-painting to enhance the appearance of my property.

Could you see how this could be applied to any of the activities you have noted down?

...discussion ...

Could this activity fit into the PQR Formula?

The Activity is the 'How' or 'Q'

10 mins (35 mins)

We can now use this definition or activity to create a conceptual model of the activities needed for this activity to work efficiently and effectively.

When we build the conceptual model, you will think about the main activities that need to happen for the system to function, this will not reflect what you actually do in reality.

The conceptual model will be compared with the rich picture to see if there is any area where action can be taken to improve how the system works in reality.

So using the fence painting example here is an activity model.

The activities are described using verbs and each activity is connected by an arrow which shows how one activity is dependent on the next.

If we think about your activity could you firstly brainstorm the logical activities needed to complete this activity – remembering that this is a conceptual model, not what you would do in reality.

De-Brief

Once the thematic analysis of all the transcriptions is completes, themes will be shared with you, to check validity of my findings.

The themes from all four groups will be merged to ensure confidentiality and anonymity is retained.

The drawings will all be re-created on computer so there will be no way of identifying who has done what.

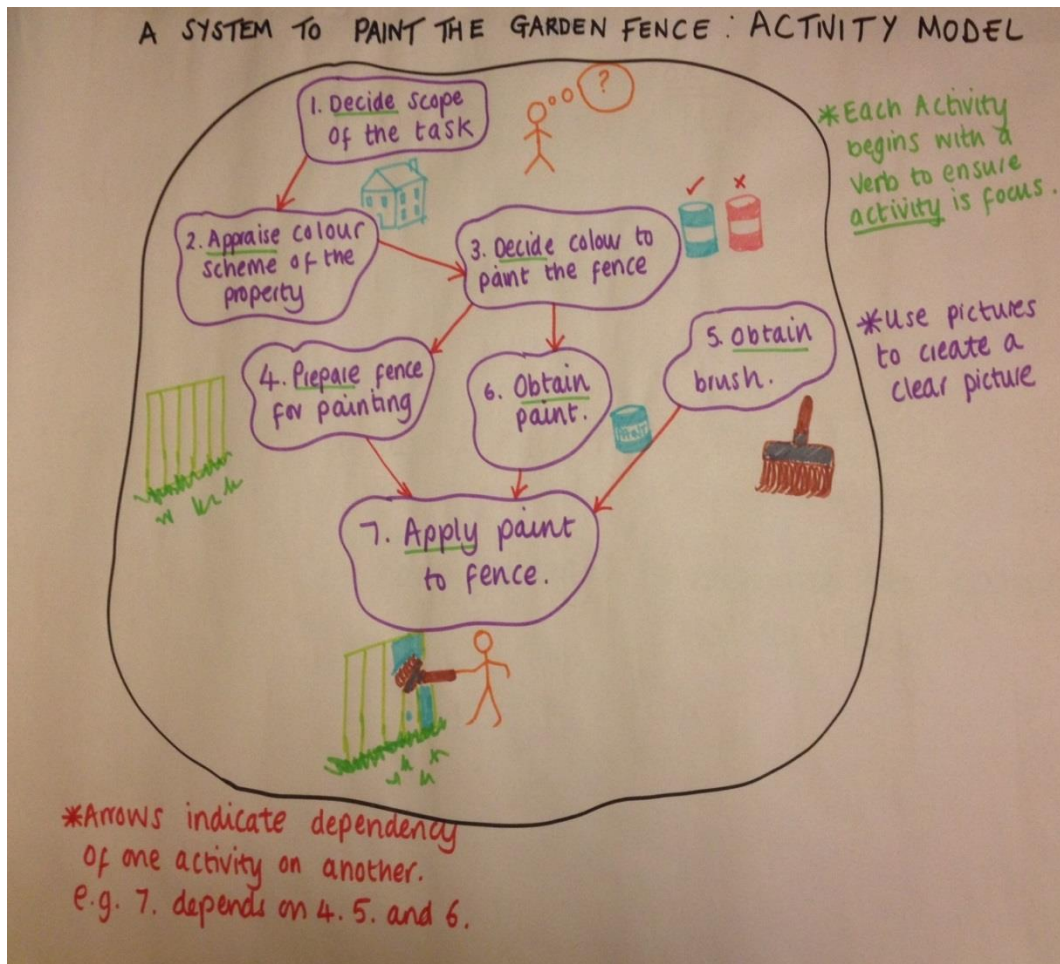
I will share the research process with the team on the service day, and broad themes will be shared too. I will share my versions of the rich picture and conceptual model, but I will need consent from every member of the group before this is done.

Glossary of Key Terms used in Soft Systems Methodology

Problem Situation	Situations which cause us to think that 'something needs to be improved' and avoids the use of the word 'problem' as this implies 'solution' which does not realistically capture the complexity of real life.
Rich Picture	A picture describing particular situations, which can express relationships in the situation and enable further discussion about the 'problem situation'
Purposeful Activity Models	An organised process of enquiry and learning which models <i>one way</i> of looking at a complex reality
Root Definitions	It describes the purposeful activity being modelled as a transformation process, one in which some entity is transformed into a different state. These can be elicited through use of CATWOE and the PQR formula
CATWOE	<p>Elements which can be usefully be thought about for any purposeful (transforming) activity.</p> <p>C – Customers (Victims or beneficiaries of the system)</p> <p>A – Actors (who carry out the activities of the system)</p> <p>T – Transformation process (what the system does to its inputs to turn them into outputs)</p> <p>W – Worldview (the view of the world that makes this system meaningful)</p> <p>O – Owner (who could abolish the system)</p> <p>E – Environmental constraints (what in the environment this system takes as a given)</p>
PQR Formula	'do P, by Q, in order to help achieve R' . PQR provides a useful shape for every and any Root Definition

Appendix 10

Conceptual Activity Model Example



Appendix 11
Card sort activity

THE CLIENTS / PROBLEM-OWNERS
THE PROBLEM-SOLVERS
RULES IN SYSTEM
ACCEPTABLE ROLES IN THE SYSTEM
HOW EP PERFORMANCE IS JUDGED
EXPECTATIONS OF EPs IN THE SYSTEM
SOURCES OF POWER
ACCESS AND CONTROL OF INFORMATION
ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS
Most Problematic situations
Least Problematic situations

Appendix 12

Thematic Analysis Process

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

1. Time pressures	2. Competing demands	3. Expectations on EPs	4. Political changes
5. Judging EP performance	6. Trading opportunity / challenges	7. Current Vs Old model	8. Working with schools
9. Greater Accountability	10. Schools expectations of EP role	11. Not knowing budgets	12. Stresses
13. Job insecurity	14. Environmental changes	15. Report writing	16. Level of buy back
17. Competition from within and outside service	18. Accessing vulnerable children	19. Marketing EP service	20. Keeping schools happy
21. Expanding / growing team	22. Feedback to schools	23. Providing value for money	24. Lack of power/ autonomy
25. Success for children	26. Flexibility of model	27. Building/ maintaining relationships	28. Different experiences of service delivery
29. Applying psychology	30. Capacity in the model	31. Meeting schools needs	32. Fear of not short changing schools
33. Schools are power-holders	34. Clear model	35. Maintaining the service	36. Contingency planning
37. Ensuring best practice	38. Threat of redundancy	39. Insecurity of tenure	40. Greater transparency
41. Developing the model	42. Appropriate referrals	43. Professional responsibility	

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

Theme	Initial code
1. Expectations of EPs	3. Expectations on EPs 7. Current Vs Old model 9. Greater accountability 10. Schools' expectations of EP role 12. Stresses 24. Lack of power / autonomy 43. Professional responsibility
2. Increased workload & pressures	1. Time pressures 2. Competing demands 6. Trading opportunity / challenges 15. Report writing 22. Feedback to schools 37. Ensuring best practice 40. Greater transparency 42. Appropriate referrals
3. Not knowing Budgets	4. Political changes 11. Not knowing budgets 16. Level of buy back 35. Maintaining the service
4. Job insecurity	13. Job insecurity 14. Environmental changes to service delivery 17. Competition from within and outside service 38. Threat of redundancy 39. Insecurity of tenure
5. Capacity in the team	21. Expanding / growing team 26. Flexibility of model 30. Capacity in the model 36. Contingency planning
6. Marketing the service	19. Marketing EP service 23. Providing value for money 28. Different expectations of service delivery 34. Clear model 41. Developing the model
7. Schools as power-holders	18. Accessing vulnerable children 20. Keeping schools happy 27. Building / maintaining relationships 31. Meeting schools needs 32. Fear of short-changing schools 33. Schools are power-holders
8. Judging EP performance	5. Judging EP performance 8. Working with schools 25. Success for children 29. Applying psychology

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

Overarching Theme	Key Theme	Sub themes
Problem situation arising from traded service delivery	Increased workload and pressures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time pressures • Increased emphasis on report writing • Traded and statutory demands on time
	Not knowing budgets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both schools and EP service not knowing budgets • Providing value for money • Maintaining service by securing good level of buy-back
	Job insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual uncertainty about jobs and redundancy • Competition from private EPs • Increased threat of redundancy
Relevant systems operating in problem situations	Marketing the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent service delivery impacts on marketing • Model must be reviewed and developed • Gaining service users' views of the model
	Schools as power-holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools have the power • Access to vulnerable children more challenging • Maintaining positive relationships with schools
	Judging EP Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ways in which EP performance is judged • Clear working models with schools • Applying psychology to ensure success for children

Activities to improve practice	Expectations of EPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountable, transparent practice with clear expectations • Lack of autonomy / power • Responsibility to keep children at centre of work
	Capacity in the team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingency planning for effective service delivery • Working flexibly in model • Working collaboratively with schools

Appendix 13

Example Transcript

Key: R= Researcher, P1 – P5 = Participants

	Transcription	Initial Coding	Themes
R	I have got some cards here which if you look at the headings on the table they are the same, so how EP performance is judged, Rules in the System, The Problem-Solvers, Acceptable Roles in the System, The Clients, Problem-Owners, access and control of information, environmental factors and this is expectations of EP's within the system and sources of power. Now you as a group can choose how you want to work as this is to instigate discussion around the different aspects that were mentioned in the questionnaire. My activity is to start by looking at the most and least problematic aspects within the system which was the traded service delivery model using these headings, but I am aware that these are donated headings that I have given to you as part of the framework, so if you want to talk around a particular aspect, it's just to start the discussion. If I put the most problematic within the system and least problematic here what I'd like to do is rank these cards to find out what are the issues that are pertinent to you as a group as being most problematic within the service model that you are working in. Can I leave you to have a discussion about that?		
P's	Uh huh		
P1	Does everyone think it would be helpful to think about it in terms of most and least problematic as a way of I think that is useful way of structuring it		
P2	Yeah that's fine		
P4	Yeah we could discuss the individual bits as we go through		
R	Just to say that you have about 10 minutes on this activity, I'm going to be timekeeper		
P1	I mean just looking through two stand out to me as being quite problematic		
P2	Yeah that's what I was about to say		

P1	The sources of power and the rules in the system that's just looking I remember our responses being on	Competing demands	Increased workload and pressures
P3	The questionnaire		
P1	Hmm		
P3	I think a lot of the rules in the system are some of the difficulties we experience at the moment in terms of the time pressures that are associated with having gone traded		
P's	Hmm		
P3	The fact that we're now delivering the traded work but the statutory work's still there		
P5	I know it's competing demands really		
P3	Are to do with the rules that we're ..		
P5	And that links in with the expectations then as well	Expectations on EPs	Expectations on EPs
P3	Yeah absolutely		
P5	Cos they lead on to the expectations that are placed upon us		
P3	Yes and I suppose all that came about because of the environmental factors in terms of the political changes y'know prior to that we didn't have any of these issues, did we, so	Environmental changes	Job Insecurity
P5	If it wasn't for that		
P3	That kind of beats the rest (laughs)		
P4	We might have things that are in parallel		
P2	Yeah I was just thinking that whether that ought to go there sort of a line out isn't it?		
P1	Yes it's kind of like saying that everything else hinges on this		
P4	Yeah I think that is for everything		
P3	It kind of is on the outside because everything hinges from it		
P3	Yeah because how EP performance is judged is now in a traded context	Judging EP performance	EP role & expectations
P4	Yes absolutely		
P1	Just just to be different (laughs) in terms of saying that it's the most problematic with the system suggests that because we've gone traded y'know it is a problem and we've gone traded because obviously the national dictates some people might say actually going traded is the most liberating thing that's happened to the educational psychology service and and is it the most problematic thing in the system or is it because we're equating the fact that we've gone traded as problematic so I'm just...	Trading opportunity / challenges	Increased workload and pressures
P4	So there's an assumption being made there		
		Trading	Increased

P's	Hmm	opportunity/ challenges	workload and pressures
P3	I suppose from my perspective the assumption's accurate (laughs) (indistinct)		
P1	Yeah, it's about whether the other system that we work in is we've got to work with it and that means we've got to work within traded but does the environmental factors the fact that it's expected by government it's what's legislated now		
P's	Hmm		
P1	We've got to go out there and make our own way now in some respects does that mean it's problematic or just that it's different		
P2	Hmm. I guess the other way of looking at it is that in whatever system there are actually things that work better and things that don't work better so something's are always going to be more problematic and least problematic in whatever system you're looking at so if we're just taking the traded service model as a system and we are looking at the issues within it		
P3	So the system we are looking at is that and from that perspective I would still say that those three are the most considerable we just have to look at the others now		
R	Could you just mention which the three are?		
P5	Rules in the system, sources of power and Expectations of EPs in the system		
P1	I think those three things are really about the change in our place in the system as well and I think in the older model our influence if I can put it like that was quite autonomous and we could go in and negotiate on a level playing field about what children need and who we go involved with now I think the traded model means that we're just on the back foot a little bit so	Lack of autonomy	Expectations on EPs
P3	I think what's concerning is when I looked at those just the thing I was thinking was now least a problem if you like was the problems we're meant to be dealing with if that makes sense. The problems we're meant to be dealing with are the clients and that's for me, only for me, is the least problematic things that we deal with	Current Vs Previous model	EP Role & expectations
P4	Because that's stayed the same		
P3	Yeah because nothing changed about that and I still feel fairly, fairly confident that I can deal with those problems even within this system I just think it's harder to deal with them now because of the things that have changed		
P5	I think some of the (indistinct) that what we are is least problematic		
P3	Hmm that hasn't changed		
P5	We're still EPs we're still those people we still have that role but it's the system which we're working in that's changed		
P3	And this has changed		
P4	I think so how EP performance is judged		

P3	I don't know if I see that as a huge problem how we're now judged but it definitely has changed a lot	Judging EP performance	Judging EP performance
P1	For me, I firstly agree with the clients and problem solvers		
P3	Shall we put those here so the client, problem-owners and problem-solvers are least problematic		
P1	Yes that's fine if you think how EPs performance is judged I think that is a big issue		
P2	Yeah it's all about accountability now, isn't it?	Accountability	Expectations on EPs
P's	Yeah		
P1	Accountability and I don't know about you but I feel a little bit more invented to people, so how they feel about me if they like the clothes that I wear y'know do I speak the right... I feel a little more less in my control... hmm because... yeah		
P2	Hmm right		
P3	Yeah I would concur with that a little bit as well in that now, y'know in the past I think we had a lot more autonomy when it came to the work that we might do in schools and whereas now there are people paying for it if you like now they're directly paying for it there's a greater pressure to do what they want not necessarily what you think is the best course of action and then you're judged on that	Autonomy	Expectations on EPs
P1	Yeah and then the challenge how far do you challenge erm a situation	Working with schools	Judging EP performance
P's	Hmm		
P3	Because that will affect how you're potentially judged if you're not gonna go back the year after it might actually cos you haven't done a good job it's because you haven't agreed with...	Judging EP performance	Judging EP Performance
P4	Which is what feeds other people's expectations yeah	Schools expectations of EPs	Expectations on EPs
P1	And to me that's		
P3	Where would you see that as being level with this or further down?		
P1	Yes level with, yeah down here... I just feel it's the most for me		
P3	How does everyone else feel?		
P4	I feel that it's level with the others rather than being a hierarchy		
P5	Hmm they all lock on to each other		
P4	Hmm I think their linked EP performance is linked to expectations because how erm what schools expect us to do erm will have an impact on whether they feel how we've performed to keep the schools happy	Working with schools	Judging EP performance
P3	So at the bottom we've got how EP performance is judged, rules in the system, sources of power and expectations of EPs in the system		

P5	What's acceptable roles in the system		
P3	That's the role we play within the system and what roles we're expected to play		
R	The roles that you can take, what is it acceptable for the EP to be within the traded service delivery model		
P3	You see in some respects I'm not convinced that this has changed	Current Vs Old model	Expectations on EPs
P's	Yeah		
P3	I would just say that we have more pressure because we're expected to do a lot more of each of the roles if that makes sense but that, I don't think that's something that's changed a lot, or I don't see that as being one of the biggest problems		
P's	Hmm		
P2	I feel more removed from children in the traded service model		
P3	Oh yeah absolutely that's why this one goes here		
R	If I could just stop you there. I suppose the main purpose of this activity is to look at of the areas encapsulated within service delivery what are most problematic for you as a group and I think we've kind of reached that point? Before we move on if you just have a look at the 2 or three that are floating around in the middle just to see if they would come onto your bottom line or would you feel they are not as important		
P4	Do you think the access and control of information the bit about school's not knowing budgets and I do think this year when it came to April kind of time that was pretty stressful I'm not sure so much for us as maingrades but possibly that might have been something more for senior EPs	Not knowing budgets	Not knowing budgets
P5	I think a sense of very personal side was we didn't know if we had a job	Threat of redundancy	Job insecurity
P3	And that's the thing it's not not only being aware of their budgets it's not being aware of ours there with the situation with your jobs and this year we've been two EPs down which is a hell of a percentage of our workforce and we've not been able to replace because we've not been sure of budgets um and we've not been able to get locums because we've not been able to secure more. So that yeah that probably is quite problematic, down here. I still feel quite strongly that this is what underpins most of the problems, it's environmental factors that mean we've lost our control of budgets and information and it's for those reasons that really all of those things have changed. But I don't know where we put it because like we said it kind of just is the overriding	Not knowing budgets	Not knowing budgets
R	If you go back to the drawing, the model of soft systems and you look at what we've just done and where we are we're very much still in that first stage where we're looking at the problem-situation but I wouldn't call this unstructured, I think we've gone into a more structured ranking, looking at where things are so the next step on from that is to start to draw the rich picture which in soft		

	systems methodology is about drawing the problem situation as it is but rather than calling it a brainstorm, you're looking at the relationships between the elements so it might be that those can act as prompts when you're thinking about the relationships within the system.		
P3	Can I just clarify do we pick one area from these or draw all of them		
R	The rich picture can be as broad or narrow focused as you want it to be. You may want to talk about 4 or 5 areas or focus deliberately on one area that for you as a group is a problematic situation. Just to say that if its focused it may help you to develop actions later on, rather than if it's too broad, but not to influence you in anyway.		
P3	If I was going to draw it I would probably, I'm not going to draw it, I would probably want environmental factors bigger than any other	Environmental factors	Job Insecurity
P4	With arrows going out of it		
P3	Yes with stress arrows (laughs)		
P4	Yeah Bronfenbrenner-esk		
R	Please all of you take a pen or a couple of colours		
P1	Do you want a big bubble with environmental factors		
P2	Oh that's good yeah		
P3	D'you like me to carry on? (laughs)		
P5	This is proper collaborative work (laughs) shall I pass the baton onto you?		
R	Please draw, we do a lot of writing don't we. So go to town with your drawings		
P3	Oh that's what I wanted to know		
P4	So this signifies the environment impacting upon the service	Environmental changes	Job insecurity
P5	So we've got the environment yeah		
P1	Right what's next, what's the next biggest issue?		
P4	Did we say sources of power		
P5	Well we had them in all in a long line, is it like that		
P4	Could we have like an EP in the middle, um		
R	You could think about a situation you've all been in a problem situation related to those, Can you try and draw that situation?		
P3	See I was thinking you could have someone in the middle and then you've got all the different stresses that are within the system	Stresses	Expectations on EPs
P4	Hmm mmm		
P3	So I was kind of like thinking of piles of paper work and sorry, but this is what I was thinking		
P5	Minus money (Laughs)	Not knowing budgets	Not knowing budgets
P3	No, yeah I'd put money down here in terms of the environment, but yeah money		

P4	Minus car		
P4	Shall I draw a little school then as well?		
P3	Shall I draw a person?		
P5	You draw the person then we can		
P3	Looking stressed?		
P5	Yeah		
P3	Shall I draw a little school on here that's impacting as well		
P2	Are the sources of power schools?		
P3	Oh sorry, would you like to do something else		
P2	That's ok, No that's fine (laugh)		
P3	There you go you can, you can add some of the person (Laugh) Can I write the name of all the different reports in a big question marks round		
P5	Yeah		
P4	What like.. (indistinct)		
P3	Yeah		
P4	Can I draw a SENCo (Laughs)		
R	Just to say you have about 10 minutes on this		
P2	Mmm Hmm		
R	Yeah and let me know what the lines indicate, is it a tension or is it a straightforward relationship? What's that?		
P5	No time, but I've realised that I've not drawn it in the right place	Time pressures	Increased workload and pressures
P1	How do you draw, or how would you draw a school saying erm we don't like what you've done so we don't want you back and we're going to want someone else?	Level of buy-back	Not knowing budgets
P4	You could just draw a speech bubble		
P2	Coming out of the school maybe?		
P1	Say something like we might want you, we might buy you back or we might find someone else (Laughter)		
P2	Cos we have got a lot more private EPs picking up our schools	Private EPs	Job insecurity
P1	Hmm		
P3	Do we want to draw private EPs, Private people as being a stress? What do private people do they drive cars with soft tops (laughter) and things like that		

P2	Don't know		
P3	Should we just draw them with a briefcase		
P2	Are we judged by other services as well because ultimately we're looking to trading outside of schools into other services, so Looked after Children, I'm trying to make links with the Youth Offending Service. So I wonder whether our performance is judged by other services and then they choose whether they want to	Judged by other services	
P4	Yeah so it's not just schools		
P3	Yeah CAMHS and		
P5	But on the other side because we're traded		
P3	We can trade		
P5	But you're not wanting to step on other services toes because they're also traded	Competition from outside the service	
P3	On the other hand there's the potential benefits of the fact that we're now able to or are considering are we going to trade with parents that kind of thing so we don't necessarily only have to be clients to the schools so there are some positives to that so it's not only a negative arrow	Trading opportunities	Increased workload and pressures
P5	Yeah		
P1	It's almost like a ... can I draw it		
P's	Yes, draw it		
P3	Whilst you're drawing that one thing I wanted to do was put vulnerable children up in a group somewhere because my one of the big concerns we have is how do we still make sure that we are able to get to those vulnerable children. Some of these things almost present a barrier don't they?	Accessing vulnerable children	Schools as power-holders
P's	Yeah		
P5	Yeah like a brick wall		
P3	Like a brick wall		
P4	Yeah and all the children could be on the other side		
P1	I don't know what I wanted to draw now		
P2	Yeah I was trying to think as well. What were we talking about		
P3	We were talking about trading with other services		
P1	Trading with other services so we've got the trading but it closes it down in terms of partnerships because we can't do partnership work as we used to because we've paid for it. So it opens up, closes down. erm then on the other side we were talking about trading with parents yeah so that's it	Marketing the EP service	Marketing the service
P5	Do you need some words on that?		

P1	Yeah so opens up trading partners but it also closes down partnerships because we can't deal without the traded part and erm I can't remember		
P2	Well we talked about parenting and we said that it opens up trading at either end one side's parents and one side's other services, is that what you were thinking?		
P5	Hmm		
P2	And in the middle it closes down from both sides		
P1	Yes that's right		
P3	I was just wondering we didn't talk about it at the time we talked about roles and you know how we said the role hadn't changed I think the one thing that has changed is that we're suddenly having to be sales people and market ourselves and things like that	Marketing the EP service	Marketing the service
P2	Hmm		
P3	I wonder if we could draw our psychology symbol um here		
P1	Do like a salesman's briefcase with the sign on it		
P3	Oh God yeah, Can I have the blue cause that is our corporate colour it looks like a WISC		
P4	That's what I was going to say		
P2	What about access and control of information	Not knowing budgets	Not knowing budgets
P5	That's the budgets I think		
P3	Have we got no money we were going to put no money weren't we? Shall we draw a sign with a cross through it		
P4	Yeah		
P1	That's pretty dire isn't it? (Laughs)		
P3	It's horrible (Laughs)		
P1	No Money no time all this work		
P2	Yeah		
P2	Umm Do we need some positives in there? I mean some of the schools are really pleased with the fact that we're contracted and they can buy as much time as they want to I mean that's a real positive as far as I am concerned but I don't know how to draw it (Laughing)	Relationships with schools	
P3	Could we do more more more		
P4	We want more I have to say that I've experienced it more in the sense of them being of the school feeling limited by the fact that they have to but us		Schools as power-holders
P3	It depends on the size of the budget though because take a school like WN they have got a big budget and their budget actually will have increased but won't have gone down significantly but smaller schools who are sort of in the leafier suburbs their budgets have been drastically cut so for them this has been a real issue	Meeting schools needs	

P4	Yeah		
P3	So it's a positive but it's also a negative is that the schools now feel that they can choose who they have that's a negative because their - they may be choosing particular people and then we have time restrictions that are you know problematic	Keeping schools happy	Schools as power-holders
P1	I think one of the things that um trading has put on us is that we're now more responsible for each other in some respects because of erm if I don't pull my weight then you've got to do it because we've got to keep the school's happy	Professional responsibility	Expectations on EPs
P5	But on the other side of it the actual team's grown hasn't it? There's more of us	Growth in team	Capacity in the team
P3	Well that's needed		
P5	But that's a huge positive I don't know how we're going to draw that because the team has expanded hasn't it?		
P1	Draw a little team and then draw a big team on		
P5	So there's more of us but we're all covering each other's work		
P2	Yeah		
R	Do you think we could come to natural stop just there that's probably the easy part because its unpicking what's happening for you all at the moment Unfortunately Soft systems methodology is not always straightforward I don't know if any of you have heard of CATWOE which is part of Soft Systems		
P's	Hmm		
R	On the Glossary sheet that I have given to you there are the elements. I am not going to get you to write down I just think if you look back at your rich picture and about that system that you've drawn there and who you believe the customers who are the victims or beneficiaries of that system are would you say that its very much what is written in the table from the questionnaires or would you say that it changes from that just have a quick look. On the rich picture you've talked about other agencies, schools, parents and the LA does that encompass what you talked about in the questionnaire.		
P3	I suppose when we looked at other agencies		
R	Does it just draw on specific elements of what you've mentioned in the questionnaire or is it as broad		
P3	I think in some respects its broader than the questionnaire because we've drawn ourselves as the problem-owners as well actually we've got a lot of problems here that we didn't mention in the questionnaire		
R	That's interesting because that's a collation of all the questionnaires and nobody saw themselves as a victim or beneficiary of the traded service system or a problem-owner		

P3	I think because the reason we came into this job is to look after these people and now we feel that we're not able to. When it comes down to it some of the biggest stresses have fallen upon us and I think it comes back to we don't take enough time to worry actually on the impact that it's having on us	Time restrictions	Increased workload and pressures
R	Who do you feel are the people that carry out the activities in this particular picture that you've drawn? In the questionnaire most of you said it was the EPs working collaboratively with School staff, parents, children and young people		
P5	I think it's moving away that it's us who are doing all these things		
P4	And the fact that we're in the middle we're the focus of the picture		
P2	And the victims are the school that we've already mentioned		
P1	But I think that we also I think could look at what's the problem for us at the moment what the tension is and the tension is actually the amount of work and um lack of time and all really sort of bear down. I think the tension is located very much within us I think outside the work that we do and the interface that we have with schools and the work that we do with children hasn't particularly changed much so that feels ok but we're carrying all of this around.	Time limitations Increased workload	Increased workload and pressures
P2	And I think what's interesting is the only children we've drawn on here are the vulnerable children and I know we've drawn a school and that's meant to signify children but I wonder if that's a little bit symptomatic of the fact that that's because what feels priority to us know is this, it's the report writing and all the other things and like we've said before it's like the focus has been taken off the kids	Accessing vulnerable children Report writing	Schools as power-holders Increased workload
P2	And I think not only has the focus been taken off the children it's about the sources of power isn't it because actually I probably feel slightly less powerful in terms of guiding work and saying I could really do with going in to see this particular child because we're very stuck to the model aren't we? We start off with the consultation and if you sort of get what you need from the consultation you don't move on to go and see the child so actually your then removed from that child so the traded model that we've followed has removed us from the children I feel, whereas with the vulnerable children we have our vulnerable pot of money now so actually the children that I pick up and I think actually I could really do with doing some work with them because I can see how vulnerable they are and you go and say can I dip into the pot of vulnerable children money ?	EP less powerful accessing vulnerable children	Expectations on EPs Schools as power-holders
P3	Or you just stick vulnerable in front of it		
P2	Yeah so you do feel more powerful and more involved with those children which is why there on there and I think that's about power and removal from the children and how far removed we feel.	More powerful with vulnerable	Expectations on EPs

		children	
P3	It's interesting because I think historically if we had been drawing what we do as a job we'd have had the child in the middle and you would have had us and all the systems around it	Success for children	Judging EP Performance
R	Hmm and this one of the hardest things that I'll ask you from the system that you're in that you've drawn specifically as a group what are the outputs what are you trying to achieve ? so what are your inputs and you're outputs so what's going into the system and what's coming out it?		
P3	Well this coming out of it, case formulations, consultations , and however many other reports we do	Report writing	Increased workload and pressures
R	Would you identify that as an output?		
P3	Well no I wouldn't really what I would say the important output is the benefits for children is the success we have with them but actually at the moment I would say that is the output more often that it is success for the children I'm sorry to say that the moment we are being judged on that rather than outcomes for children	Judging EP performance	Judging EP performance
P1	That's right and I think that links with what P2 was saying because of the way that we work the traded model we kind of do that aspect of work and then come out. I do my consultation I mean I am writing a lot more on those that needs review and monitoring so because that's the only way you will get back to see or hear about that child (indistinct) I think you are but I think the discussions during consultations are all geared to and I'll come and see the- so it's almost as though they've got to deny that movement forward	Report writing	Increased workload and pressures
P3	One of the difficulties is one of the first things that got cut from the case formulation when we realised that we haven't got time is feedback. How could that be the first thing that was out? When we're talking about output that feedback meeting was probably the one thing that we needed to save but it was the first thing that went	Feedback to schools	Increased workload and pressures
P1	I think it's less important because how then can you judge how our work how effective our work is in terms of outcomes for children when we aren't at that stage we do start with it and then we don't go back to school to say well how did that work? Whats going on with little Johnny now?	Success for children	Judging EP performance
P2	I've got to say that I do try and whenever I do a case formulation or consultation to book in a monitoring and review meeting I'll go and say we need to book in a monitoring and review meeting for this child I'd like to come next week I've never had a school say no to me yet, but I do try to sort of guide them and then the other thing you talking about feedback in terms of case formulations it's not so much the feedback to parents its often the feedback or internal communication in school and it doesn't get back to the right person who's actually best port of call for the child that's the experience I had today and then I shared my case formulation and they said yeah that's no problem I can do that	Feedback process	Increased workload and pressures

P4	But that the same before trading?		
P2	No you see that feels different to me that feels as though that's the change because we are more removed from the child whereas previously I would have been a lot more involved with the child so I'd be talking to the staff who were supporting the child individually more	Success for children	Judging EP performance
P3	Previously we didn't submit a report at all did we? We went in we did our observations and generally at the end of your observation you would have a chat with the class teacher and the TA because they were there and you would say oh I spotted this today Now you're going to go in do your observation and you rush out and think I've still got to do some one to one work I've got to get back because I've got three hours to write up a case formulation	Report writing and time pressures	Increased workload and pressures
P4	So there definitely is a change so they have to you know because they've paid however many hundreds of pounds they need something on paper	Expectations on EPs	Expectations on EPs
P3	And that is a lot of how we're judged isn't it?		
R	Ok so so we we've gone through the Customers, Actors the T is the most difficult which talks about the transformation that is occurring within the system moving from inputs to outputs. The W is about the World view or perspective this system is being drawn from		
P1	I think it's a professional view		
P2	Hmm it is I was thinking a little bit more in terms of the schools we talked about school having their budgets reduced	Not knowing budgets	Not knowing budgets
P3	Some of its personal so you've got political views		
P4	And I think reason why a lot of us are feeling stressed is because this world view that we've had to draw out, is completely incompatible with our own personal world view our own lives its certainly incompatible with my view of what I want this world to be like in terms of what we're doing it's totally on its head	Expectations on EPs	Expectations of EPs
R	Then we're onto the O for the owners, who has the power to abolish the system? You have put Tories on there		
P5	Well schools have the power if that gets bigger in the picture then this bit all gets a lot smaller doesn't it?	Schools have power	Schools as power-holders
P4	But actually to a certain extent I think we haven't put it on here because I don't think we feel as though non –seniors, or whatever the word should be – we don't feel that we have the autonomy to change the set up that actually in a way our service leaders y'know our seniors do have some power over changing aspects of this don't they, actually we created this yes it was created as a consequence of environmental factors but all of this new case formulation , consultation aspect was created by our service we probably wouldn't have chosen to have done it that way but as its been created by us even though we've got all of these patches there are aspects of this that could maybe not be abolished but certainly changed	Lack of autonomy Environmental changes	Expectations of EPs Job insecurity

R	And then the last point is the E which is the environmental factors which I think you've shown quite clearly about the environmental constraints with the Local Authority and the budgets. The reason that we go through the CATWOE, these six elements is so you can create a definition of the system basically what are you trying to do in the system, how are you doing it and why and that is actually a formula which I'll write down here, which will help to create a root definition . This is called the PQR formula and it's on the glossary sheet too. So what you should end up with is a system that does P by doing something Q in order to achieve R. So a system that's trying to be transparent by working collaboratively that's the P in order to achieve good working relationships. So have a go.		
P3	So we're doing traded work by writing loads of reports to achieve buy back	Writing reports for buy back	Increased workload
R	That can be one Root Definitions are a conceptual idea its basically showing you what the system is , which is based on the world view of you as a group		
P3	Can we write down what we want to be doing , how and to achieve what ?		
R	That is the next the next step! But have a go have a think		
P3	You don't feel that reflects the picture?		
P2	Yeah possibly but it doesn't reflect my view of what I'm doing. I think although I'm working in a traded service I'm trying not to lose the fact that actually the outcomes for children are the most important thing for me.	Ensuring best practice	Increased workload
R	If you could think of a couple root definitions and then the purpose of this is that when we come back as a group because we're not looking at actions at all today we're just trying to build up a conceptual model of what the ideal picture , or hypothetical model that we would like to work in. This is purely conceptual, this group is to give you thinking time.		
P3	That's why I asked whether we should write down what we actually wanted to be doing so if anyone thinks what I actually want to be doing is writing lots of reports to achieve survival but sometimes I think we've all said in this picture that we feel we've lost the children we feel we are doing more of this we're not speaking to the teachers	Maintaining the service	Not knowing budgets
P2	I do find that I'm using more psychology around case formulations though (laughs)	Applying psychology	Judging EP performance
P1	For me I think we're looking at the bottom half of this at the tensions we haven't really gone into the clients and the problem-solvers and the things like that		
P2	And I am not very good at doing the problematic stuff cause I am quite a positive person		
R	Well shall we start with a positive one then		
P2	Well I agree in terms of us needing to keep our jobs in the traded bit as well but if we only had to have one definition I would not like that to go down	Job insecurity	Job Insecurity

P2	If we put all of them down		
R	Yeah so if we spend about the next fifteen minutes and you could write down five or six or you could write down a couple it's up to you as a group		
P1	I still think that your first one was right we sell our psychology to schools to keep them happy in order that they buy us back in order that	Keeping schools happy	Schools as power-holders
P5	Hmm it's like we do what the schools ask by doing lots of reports to achieve more buy-back		
P4	I think yeah that sounds right		
P1	In this system		
R	And if you want to put that as Root Definition one or RD1 then we know that it's the first of a few.		
P4	What about something about we do what the schools want because for me that's one of the key um we're run ragged	Keeping schools happy	Schools as power-holders
P3	In order to keep them happy (laughing)		
P4	That is true though because that one links into this one		
P3	So, we do what the schools want	Doing what schools want to achieve buy back	EP role & Expectation
P5	By running ourselves ragged		
P4	To give the schools what they want sometimes collaboratively because we don't always let the schools dictate do they?		
P1	In order to achieve happy schools		
P3	See I've got a slightly rebellious one in that umm we umm we try to do what we think matters by breaking free of the model	Working flexibly in the model	Capacity in the team
P4	Working flexibly in the model		
P3	Um breaking free of the model I think would possibly be more appropriate here um to meet the needs of children		
P5	It's like we support the children to vulnerable children don't we by doing things completely not in the model in order to achieve better outcomes		
R	P3 did you want to write down your one?		
P1	We do psychology		
P2	Yeah um by actually writing the case formulation it's actually where I do more psychology in order to achieve better outcomes for children. I do a lot of thinking around my case formulation and I get a lot of psychology in there uh I do talk through my case formulations to school SENCo or teacher. Mind you the thing about working outside of the model isn't is this is supposed to be defining what this is	Applying psychology when report writing	Increased workload and pressures
P3	But working with vulnerable children is within our new system see I would like to put that down because the one place where I still feel that I am able to do the job I want to do is in the xxxxx unit	Accessing vulnerable	Schools as power-holders

	and in the xxxx	children	
P4	Umm yeah		
P3	I feel when I am in those place I am able to do the work that that matters		
P1	So what are you doing then?	Building relationships with schools	
P2	Is it therapeutic intervention stuff?		
P3	It's not really it's that you're able to go in you're able to spend time build relationships with staff have those conversations and I don't have any reports for the xxxxx I don't write any reports for the xxxx but I do go in once a fortnight and spend a morning with them		
P1	So would you say greater flexibility and more contact		
P2	I mean I would still work within the model		
P3	See I think it's not because I've never worked here without the model so I don't know what I'm comparing it to and I think it's a continuum in the sense that the model more restrictive but for me it isn't black or white it isn't like I can't kind of do the job that I was doing in another service before because actually for me it is quite similar	Flexibility in the model	Capacity in the team
P's	Hmm		
P4	But I'm not comparing it to how it used to be here.		
P3	I don't think that the job we do is different I think the emphasis is on very different things the emphasis used to be I think on the relationships that we had with schools on the time that we were spending there the conversations that we had whereas now I think there is a lot of paperwork and a lot less time for the conversations	Changed expectations	Expectations of EPS
P4	But do you think that's an experience by people that have worked in this EPS for a longer time		
P3	Probably because this EPS was a non-report writing service		
P4	Because in our old service we still compiled a report before		
P3	Yeah and you see I purposefully wanted to come back to this EPS because of having experienced other services where they spent most of their time writing a report and I didn't want to do it because for me that is not the best way to share your knowledge its not the best way to achieve the outcomes for children because most of those reports like in the school you were in the other day they do not get passed to the right people or are never read anyway	Greater accountability	
P4	But that might be helpful for you R in the sense that for some of us in this group we're coming at it from a different perspective because this has only ever been our system and for P5 and I in this EPS I mean we haven't	Different expectations of service delivery	Marketing the service
P2	Yeah I mean for me in this system I write as little as possible (Laughs) so I do if I can get away with it as brief case formulations although when I do case formulations I do a good job and generally they get passed on and stuff gets implemented because I make sure I monitor basically		

	so I don't know I guess it's different for all of us.		
P3	I would think that I would want to put something I do still get the opportunity to apply psychology as I would like to by working by umm by working it is outside of the model isn't it when we're not writing reports	Different expectations of service delivery	Marketing the service
R	Is it the old way of working?		
P3	Yeah, by working in the old way(laughs) I mean for me it's working without the reports that makes the difference for me, by not being constrained by report-writing or something like that	Current Vs Old model	Expectations of EPs
P5	By working in a way the EPS used to		
P4	I think it needs to say that it doesn't need doesn't require reports		
P3	By working in the old way in brackets without the need for reports		
P4	Yeah um		
P3	To achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children and actually it's not just constrained to the xxxx and the xxxx because I think the pieces of work that I am happiest about are in my mainstream schools I've also been those like when I went in with you I was meant to be seeing a kid for a case formulation but couldn't because he was in a play or something and ended up working with a vulnerable child	Success for children	Judging EP performance
R	Ok so we've got quite a lot there to be going on with the Root Definitions will be where we start when we meet up again in the autumn and then we will use the Root Definitions or a Root Definition depending on time to create a conceptual model to look at what the ideal situation would look like. This has helped to make quite explicit what the problems are. I think that was the hardest thing that you will probably encounter with Soft Systems Methodology. I will stop the tape now and give you a debrief. Thank you.		